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"I NEVER SHALL FORGET," CAPTAIN HALFORD SAID. "YOU ARE NOT A PERSON THAT COULD EASILY SLIP FROM ONE'S MEMORY."

## DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

### CHAPTER IV.

About four miles from our home, as the road lies, and eight by the grand trunk road that passes within a short distance of the muddy cart-track leading to our bungalow, there stands an old palace, in an immense garden, surrounded by a high stone wall, and an equally high hedge of prickly pears.

It was a favourite ride of mine, to canter over to the gardens, give my horse to a native groom, and then to saunter about the empty palace, or along the shady walks, till sundown warned me that it was time to turn homeward.

The palace had a story, and a bad name. It was said to be haunted by a white woman, taken prisoner at the time of the Mutiny, who had killed her captor, and then put an end to herself.

It was a curious old place, deserted now all but the gardens, which, thanks to their fertility, were kept up by the Rajah who owned

them; that is to say, he let the ground to a fruit merchant, and once or twice in the season came with a large suite of friends and retainers, and feasted among the remains of former greatness.

The gardeners knew me well. I was one of their best customers for mangoes and a peculiar kind of orange for which this garden was famous.

A heavy stone gateway led into it; it was divided into long walks, bordered with bananas, orange trees, date palms, and flowering shrubs; there were but few cultivated flowers, but ferns and lilies and sweet jessamine grew almost wild. Here and there were white stone reservoirs for holding water, here and there a pond of gold-fish, a disused fountain, or a summer kiosk. In the centre and the densest part of the garden stood the palace, a grey building surrounded by deep verandahs, of stone fretwork and light pillars three stories high. It was open on all sides to the winds of Heaven.

On each story was a wide room, with small rooms surrounding it, and not a door among them.

The special evening I am now going to describe is one that in looking back upon the story of my long life I can fix on as the precise moment at which my fate underwent a radical change—a change that was destined to affect the whole of my future career. I had had a long gallop, and leaving "Rustum" under a tree in charge of his groom I entered, and sauntered towards the palace, ascended to the first story, and, seating myself on a stone seat, removed my hat, tossed back my golden locks, that had become somewhat loose in my recent gallop; and, leaning my elbows on the parapet, surveyed the scene beneath me. The scarlet gold mohur, and fragrant frangipanni were conspicuous among all the other trees; and the flocks of green parrots, blue jays, and golden orioles flew and flashed from one clump or thicket to another. There was no one in the garden but myself; the gardeners had gone home. It seemed a pity that such a lovely sight as lay before me was to be admired by one pair of eyes alone. As I sat thus surveying the scene, with my head on my breast, I suddenly heard a voice—a man's voice—say,—

"Look! it is the enchanted princess of the fairy tale! It is goldylocks herself!"

"Shut up, you idiot!" said another voice. I started to my feet and looked up into the sky, in the verandah, above me. I heard footsteps, but I could see nothing. I felt very much frightened; my heart bounded wildly, and my knees literally knocked together. I clutched the parapet for support, as I heard steps ascending the stairs and approaching me through the now rather dim centre room. In another moment three men came out into the full light, and I stood within two yards of me on the stone verandah. The first was—or was my imagination to be blamed?—the hero of my dream; the second was short, square, with grizzly hair; the third was very young, and tall and fair, with a large hooked nose, and bright faithless-looking blue eyes.

They were all in shooting dress; hark! coats, belts, and leather gaiters, and all carried guns. "I am afraid we have alarmed you," said number one, doffing his large, soft grey hat. "We have lost our way; and we came in here to see if we could find any one to put us in the right direction. We must apologise for the intrusion!"

He had a charming voice, but I had totally lost mine. Strive as I would, I could not speak. I literally could only lean against the stone ledge and stare.

"Perhaps he does not understand English?" said the elderly man, to my great indignation. "Try her in Hindustani—or French?"

"Yes; I do speak English!" I burst out, in haste to contradict him; "but I was so surprised that I could not articulate!"

"An accident that does not often befall your sex, madam!" he answered, taking off his hat as he spoke, and revealing a bald head. "Can you kindly assist us to find the way to our camp? We are strangers in the land."

"In what direction is it?" I asked. I could talk easily enough to him; meanwhile I was conscious that the eyes of the two young men were rivetted upon me.

"Near a village on the banks of a river—a village called Paldi—about half a mile below that. Do you know where it is?"

"I know it well; I am going to within a short distance of it myself, and will show you the way if you like!"

"Thanks, a thousand times. I hope we shall not be giving you any trouble. We are a shooting party from Gurrumpore, and have been out six weeks. If—if I may present myself—I am Mr. Hinkson, a traveller. This is my nephew, Jack Hare, indicating the hooked-nosed youth, "an officer in the Fusiliers quartered at Gurrumpore. This is Captain Halford, of the same regiment."

I nodded to him in acknowledgment, but took no clear notice of the introductions.

"Perhaps I should tell you my name," I asked. "Should I?"

"Quite as you please; we shall be much honoured."

On second thoughts I felt shy. I could not possibly bring it out; so, picking up my hat and putting it on, I said—

"If you will follow me I will show you a short way to Paldi, if you don't mind rough ground, and jumping a few dug nullahs."

"Oh, we don't mind," returned Jack Hare, "but—" and he looked rather anxiously at his uncle.

"Oh, I'm all right; I'm rested now. I'll walk you down any day, young man!" with which proud boast he followed me down the steps and into the garden.

"You are not walking, are you?" he inquired, glancing at my white habit.

"No, I never walk; my horse is here," and raising my voice I called "Laloo!" and instantly from behind a tree, where they had both been dozing, Laloo appeared leading my beautiful grey Arab.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the two young men, "what a beautiful horse!" as with his tale and neck arched he came curvetting towards me.

"The handsomest Arab I've ever seen!" said Captain Halford. After a pause, "And must have a rare turn of speed. Allow me to mount you?"

"No thank you," waving him off. "I can manage best myself," and in another second I was on his back. "Laloo, go home!" I said, imperiously, and looking down at my three companions I could not resist saying, "Now, perhaps, you would like to see how he can gallop?"

"Not now, for mercy sake, my dear young lady!" cried Mr. Hinkson. "Don't be so cruel as to leave us here like sheep in the wilderness!"

"No; I have promised, and I won't desert you. But how did you lose your way? Where are your people?"

"We were after sand-grouse, and then a black buck got up. We stalked and stalked him till we lost him and our way, and our beaters and coolies, and everything," said Jack Hare, walking beside me. "My uncle was dead beat, when we saw that old palacio. And thankful we all were to have a drink of water and some fruit."

"Were you there long before you discovered me?"

"About an hour. And when we saw you we all thought we were in a fairy tale, you looked so awfully unexpected and jolly, with your white dress and yellow hair!"

Meanwhile Captain Halford, who I noticed carried the old gentleman's gun, walked behind and said nothing. All the conversation was left to Jack and his uncle.

"Had you good sport?" I inquired.

"No; wretched," cried Mr. Hinkson. "I thought we should be knocking over a brace of tigers every day! Instead of that we have been out six weeks, and only got a spotted deer, a cow, a man, a couple of buck, and a porcupine!" he concluded, in a mournful tone.

"A wretched bag!" I answered. "Why father got four tigers, and two leopards this season!"

"Did he really? I suppose you are out from some of the northern stations? Where is your camp? Have you many guns?"

"Camp! camp! I don't understand you."

"I mean, are you not also out in camp, on a shooting trip. I know lots of ladies go now-a-days."

"No I'm not," I answered. "I live here always!"

"You what?" almost shouted Mr. Hinkson.

"I live—have lived—all my life about a mile this side of the village of Paldi."

"I say!" expostulated Mr. Hall, "you know you are chaffing!"

"Chaffing! what is chaffing? I never heard the word before. What does it mean?"

There was a dead silence.

I think my companions began to believe me. I could feel that they were exchanging glances. At this moment we came to our first nullah—a nullah is a deep crack in the ground, varying from three feet deep and three feet wide to a hundred deep and forty or fifty in width. This one was about twenty feet deep by fifteen. "Rustum!" and I knew it well; it could not be taken at a walk, so quitting my companions, I broke into a gallop, rushed him at it, and landed like a deer on the other side. Then I turned and watched the others getting across. Captain Halford helped Mr. Hinkson to scramble down, with his funny little short-gaitered legs, and to scramble up; his nephew Jack took care of himself.

"Your horse jumped like a deer, and you rode him like a deer!" said Mr. Hare, as he joined me.

"I did not know that deer could ride!" I answered.

"Ha! ha! Jacky, my boy. Nipped your fine compliment in the bud, and quite right too. My dear young lady, how splendidly you ride, if I may say so!"

"Oh, yes! you may. Of course I can ride; I've ridden ever since I was about three; it's second nature to me."

"I cannot, cannot get over your living here. You are not joking—now, are you?"

"No, I never joke."

"Have you any society?"

"Only the village of Paldi, if you call that society."

"Good heavens! but you have some European neighbours, have you not?" persisted Mr. Hinkson.

"Not one. Nay, to spare you the trouble of asking any rude questions, I may as well tell you at once that, except my father and two old servants, you and these gentlemen are the only Europeans I have ever seen."

This amazing announcement caused a dead and a profound silence to fall upon the whole party—a silence which lasted until we reached another and more intricate nullah than the last, and I could feel that my companions were looking at me furtively, as if I was some wonderful and unique natural curiosity!

After this we discoursed of the wet, the rainy and the cold weather, of the chances of a flood in the river by-and-by; and I ventured to ask Mr. Hinkson, who kept close beside me, a few questions touching Gurrumpore.

"Were there many ladies there?" I asked.

"About fifty."

"Were they pretty?"

"No, not particularly. Not in his style at any rate."

"What did they do all day?"

"They danced, and rode, and ate, and drank, and talked, and flirted; they all gossiped, and abused one another behind their backs."

"Then I am glad I don't live at Gurrumpore!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, there are worse places," said Mr. Hare. "In the cold weather there comes, and polo, and tennis."

"Polo and tennis, what are they?"

"Have you never heard of them?" asked at me very hard. "They are both games, played with a ball; at polo you ride a pony, at tennis you run, and rub about in feet in capital exercise."

"Then I should prefer polo," I returned emphatically.

"No doubt you would make an 'A' performer, only you see ladies don't usually play."

"Don't they? What a pity. If I got a chance I should like to learn."

This remark was made close to our own entrance, which consisted of two great gate piers—no gate—leading into a short avenue of big Peepul trees, that went straight across our compound, which in England would be called quite a small demesne, being an expanse of about forty acres, enclosed by a prickly hedge, and dotted with trees. The avenue led up to the back of our bungalow, which as I have before said faced the river. "Here I am at home," I exclaimed, and I was about to say that I would send a servant to guide them for the remainder of the way, but looking down on Mr. Hinkson's hot, dusty, tired, countenance, I had compassion on him, and I added, "Perhaps you would like to come in and rest?"

"Thanks!" taking off his hat and wiping his forehead. "I must say I think walking in this country is desperate hard work. Next time I go out from camp without a pony you may call me a Dutchman!"

"Then come in and rest awhile," I said. "Father will be home very shortly, and I led the way, followed by my three new acquaintances, who were all walking in line."

From the back of the verandah we were desorbed by Peggy. I could distinguish her hands uplifted with astonishment at the sight of my followers, who were our very first visitors.

I cantered on ahead, and thus found a moment's time to break the matter to her gently.

"Sakes alive! what's all this?" she cried as I came within earshot. "What do I see coming up after you?"



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"Three gentlemen who have lost their way from their camp, near Paldi. I met them at the old palace, and have brought them so far."

"You need not tell me that—sure, don't I see them?"

"And I've asked them to come in and see."

"Well, ye could do no less. Ye could not have them at the gate, maybe fainting with thirst and hunger, and never ask if they had a mouth in them. Of course, they bid to come up—I hope the master won't go clean out of his mind."

With which agreeable aspiration, and muttering something about "verandah" and "refreshments," she bounced into the house, and was lost to sight.

A few moments later, when my followers were actually seated in the said verandah, contemplating the view, the stags' horns and trophies, the garden, the long range of stables, and Amba tethered under the trees, she reappeared in a clean apron, her black silk (how she got into it in the time was simply a marvel).

She was now all smiles and curtsies, and was followed by two servants, bearing trays and glasses. This influx of visitors was nearly as great an event to her as it was to me, and nothing in their appearance escaped her sharp eyes.

Arrived by a whisky and soda, Mr. Hinkson became more loquacious than ever. He alluded to me that, having made his fortune (he did not say how) and retired, "he had now come away from England to see the world"—my own favourite expression. How odd it seemed to me that he should call coming out in the jungle seeing the world! I called going to England "seeing the world."

Conversation soon became very pleasant and general. I did not talk much. I was only too pleased to listen to Mr. Hinkson explaining his experiences, whilst his companions threw in a remark or a joke now and then.

As I sat in a deep chair, with my hat in my lap, surrounded by the three strange gentlemen, and I must say enjoying the great serenity of my position, and no longer the least shy (why should I be shy in my own world?), Peggy hastily came over, and whispered excitedly into my ear,—

"His Rance, honey, goodness protect ye! the master is coming, riding up the avenue."

## CHAPTER V.

Fanny's face was certainly "a study" when I turned the corner of the verandah on his black Arab. Very stern he looked, as his eyes met in the most unusual, unexpected scene! However, his instincts of hospitality were stronger than his surprise. And when Mr. Hinkson half rose, and called out in a hoarse voice,—

"Quite taken you by storm, you see!" his face relaxed, and he dismounted, and gave them each and all a cordial welcome.

Mr. Hinkson spared me all explanation. In two minutes he had related their own bad luck, their good fortune in coming across me, and my kindness in acting as guide and helper, &c.

Now, I discovered, soon assimilate when they get upon the topic of "sport." In a quarter of an hour they were all busily discussing and comparing "bags" and "experiences," as sociably as if they had known each other for months.

When I heard father say, "Of course you will stay and dine?" and they promptly agreed to do so, with many apologies for their absence, I rushed off to prepare Peggy for such a formidable addition to our table.

Peggy was not a whit dismayed; she had expected it, and was quite complacent over the result.

"There's soup as usual, fish fresh from

the river, mutton cutlets, stewed pigeons, roast peacock, curry and rice, sweets, pineapples, plantains, and one of our own plum cakes, and caskings of the best claret and champagne. What more would they have?"

"Yes, I suppose it will do, with plenty of flowers and lights on the table, and the silver branch candlesticks," I said, somewhat doubtfully.

"Do, of course it will do, but I'll tell you what won't do—that's yourself—the only lady in the place, and you must be dressed up."

"Dressed up! and in what? I have nothing but my white cottons, as you know very well!"

"No, unless your good dark blue cloth habit, and you could not well wear that, I suppose?"

"Not exactly," I returned, with deep scorn. "And those two young gentlemen have set off to the camp, after all, to dress themselves up, but the old man is just going to wash his hands in the master's room; he and the master are great already over the shooting. Well, now what can we do to smarten you up? First and foremost take down your hair."

After everything was said and done I did not look a bit different to every day, my hair smoothly coiled, a clean, high, white muslin dress, and my rather shabby leather belt.

I looked at my reflection with a very discontented face, and at last a happy thought struck me, and, suddenly turning to Peggy, I seized both her hands in mine, and said,—

"I have it, Peg! The diamonds!"

"That's true! There's the necklace, but I'm thinking that would be going too far—in the other way—too much dress."

"But what good are they if they are never to be seen and worn? When shall I ever have such another chance of showing them off? They may lie another fifteen years, and not a soul cross the threshold, and now is my chance!"

"That's true enough," she once more assented. "I suppose you may as well give them a turn when you can."

And in a few moments she was putting my only piece of dress round my neck, and very magnificent I looked.

How the stones flashed and shone! They seemed almost too bright, too dazzling.

At first my impulse was to take them off. But as I gazed I had not it in my heart to remove them, and I figured about before the glass, twisting and turning my neck about to catch their sparkling reflection from every point of view.

"The gentlemen is back," said Peggy, entering after a long absence, "and it is there you are before the glass yet. Go away now and talk to them, and don't get your head turned."

Thus driven forth I entered the drawing-room and found I was the last arrival, and that every eye was instantly fixed on me. I thought I heard a slight exclamation of horrified astonishment escape from father, but it may have been imagination; and how Mr. Hinkson stared at me and my diamonds! Indeed so did the two young men, who were now clad in neat tweed suits, and spotless linen, but they surveyed me in a less obtrusive fashion whilst he gaped open-mouthed.

"Dinner ready on the table," shouted our big native "palla," and Mr. Hinkson rose and advanced towards me, and held out his arm.

"May I take you in to dinner?" he said.

"No, thanks," I replied; "I can walk alone quite well. Did you think I was lame?" I inquired, merrily.

"There, lead the way, Rance," said my father rather sharply, and I could tell by the tone of his voice that I had made some terrible mistake.

Dinner was a success. I had sufficient intelligence to grasp that agreeable fact.

We had a capital cook, and he had done his best.

The soup and fish were excellent, and Mr. Hinkson called for another help of "Turkey," and was rather startled to hear that he had been eating peacock!

As champagne circulated conversation became brisk.

Mr. Hinkson made eager inquiries about the possible chance of getting a tiger within a reasonable distance, and talked most valiantly of the slaughter of wild beasts.

Father discoursed of the hundred tigers he had shot in his time, and of the probability of finding a couple about ten miles off about the banks of the river.

Mr. Hare listened to them, and looked at me. Captain Halford not only looked at me, but addressed to me his whole conversation.

"Did I not find the jungle lonely, and the days long?"

"Not when father is at home."

"And when he is at home how do you put in your time?"

"In the morning we ride, in the day time I read, in the evening I ride again, or go out in the boat or garden; I find plenty to do."

"And you don't miss society?"

"I do not miss what I have never known."

"Have you all the new books? Do you see the latest novels? What do you read?"

"We do get new books two or three times a year. I have never read a novel, unless you call 'Robinson Crusoe,' and the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' novels. I read history and essays, and now and then I do a little Latin or mathematics, not to forget what I have learnt."

"Then you have had quite a boy's education!"

"Quite."

"And never read a love tale in your life! Indeed, perhaps, the very name of love and lovers is now mentioned in your ears for the first time?"

I blushed. I could not say why, and, then looking him full in the face, I asked boldly,—

"Is there anything very remarkable about me that you smile in such a way? Am I different to other girls?"

"Yes, there is one very remarkable thing about you," he answered, still smiling.

"Oh, I know; my complete ignorance."

"No, I should think you were unusually well educated."

"Then—my diamonds?"

"No; extraordinary as they are, it is not your marvellous diamonds?"

"Then do tell me what it is, please—please, do."

"I will another time, not now. May I ask if that necklace is a heirloom?"

"No, it was given to father by a native prince. He gave it in return for some favour, but he was glad to get rid of it. He said it was unlucky, and the centre stone (touching it), is called the Evil Eye."

"I am sure its ill-luck must vanish now that it is in your possession," said Captain Halford, politely.

"I hope so, at any rate! This is the first time I have ever worn it."

"I hope it may bring you nothing but good fortune; and I," taking up his glass, "drink to the diamond necklace and its owner. May their future be bright and gay, and may they never be parted!"

"Thank you; but as to our future being gay you are pleased to be sarcastic at our expense."

"You don't mean to tell me that you are to be buried alive in the jungle all your life!" he exclaimed, rather sharply.

"I don't know what you call buried alive. I suppose, indeed I know, that I shall always live, and no doubt live here."

"Impossible! Your father would never be so selfish!"

"Hush! Father is not selfish; you must not say such things. He is the best father in the whole world."

"And are you content?" looking at me narrowly.

"Not always," I confessed; "not with my best friends."

am alone here for weeks at a time, with Peggy. Then I often feel—oh! I'm ashamed to say how I feel—such a vehement impatience at my life here, such a strong wish for wings to get away from this river bank, such a thirst to know other surroundings, to learn what other people's life is like, in short, "lowering my voice in case father should hear me; "to see the world."

"I don't wonder! It would be odd if you did not."

"But please don't think I am often in such a frame of mind. It is only when father is away, and the days are empty, and Peggy is cross."

"Have you never had any companion but Peggy?"

"Never. I do not remember my mother. She died before we came here, when I was quite a baby. Now I have told you all about myself, it is your turn to tell me what you do, and how you spend your time, and I am sure your proceedings are ten times more interesting than mine."

"When I am at Gurrumpore I spend a lot of my time on duty, I play tennis, or ride of an afternoon."

"By yourself?"

"Oh, no!—generally with some of the other fellows, sometimes with ladies. Then we have mess at eight o'clock, a game of billiards, unless we dine out, or go to a dance; and that's all. Not much in that?"

"Are there any pretty young ladies?"

"Yes; one or two."

"What are they like, and what are their names?"

"Miss Monk is small and dark, with very bright eyes, and good teeth; she rides well, too. Miss Julian is fair and tall; she does not do much besides talking and dancing."

"What a lazy girl! And are you married?"

"I? Oh, dear no! and he laughed."

"Or the other gentlemen?"

"No."

"What, not even Mr. Hinkson! Surely he is married?"

"Not even Mr. Hinkson; but I believe he is looking for a wife."

"Really! But he is too old and—"

"Ugly, you were going to say, were you not?"

"Never mind. I say I don't think he will find a wife."

"Oh, won't he! Shows how little you know about it; he could get a dozen to-morrow. He is immensely rich, and that's the main thing. Money is a fine bait!"

"And Mr. Hare?" I continued, still curious.

"Is as poor as Job, and I am little better."

"Are you really poor? You don't look it," I said, frankly.

"Well, I am not exactly a beggarman, going about in rags, which is perhaps your idea of poverty; but to live on my pay and my small allowance and to keep out of debt is rather a tight fit, I can tell you."

"I think papa is rich," I said, looking at my parent meditatively.

"I should not wonder if he was," argued my listener, with a significant glance at me and my diamonds.

"Well, Rance, we are going to smoke," said father, "and you might like to go into the drawing-room."

"No thank you, father; I would much rather stay here, and you know I am accustomed to your cigars after dinner, and rather like them than otherwise."

Nevertheless, my dear, we will dispense our company for the present."

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"My name is really Diana Manners; Rance is only a pet name. I play the guitar very little indeed; but I dare say you play it well."

"Yes, and sings like a bird," broke in Mr. Hare.

"Now Halford, strike up something lively; we will go over and sit in those chairs they have put overlooking the river. The moon, the river, a guitar, and ladies' eyes go capitally together. Come along and give us one of your Spanish ballads," he reiterated, leading the way as he spoke.

Captain Halford needed but little pressing. He followed us obediently over to the seats in question; slung the guitar ribbon over his head, and, after a very short hesitation, struck up the air of a delightful song—as far as his voice and the air went; but what it was all about I could not say; the tune, a kind of haunting, pathetic air, was ample engagement for me.

Another, an English song, followed, and the music brought out father and Mr. Hinkson, who now joined the circle, and we all sat down in a semi-circle on the edge of the river-bank.

"Mr. Hinkson tells me you have a fortnight here yet!" said father, addressing the two young men. "If you would stay here a week, that would leave you a week to get back, and I think I could show you some sport in the shape of a tiger or two. You might pitch your tents in this compound, and live here altogether. I shall be very glad of your company."

"And so shall I!" I added, with most unnecessary frankness, and unusual impression.

I saw a smile creeping round Captain Halford's moustache, as he accepted father's invitation with undoubted pleasure. As for Mr. Hare, he actually rubbed his hands and jumped about like a schoolboy, so great was his delight.

"You see," said father, "you strangers don't know the country—I do! I have lived here for so many years that I am looked upon as a kind of lord of the soil, and all the tigers and big game within fifty miles are preserved solely for me. Shikaris would take your money and tell you lots of lies, but they would not dare to beat for one of my tigers! I know of a pair, tiger and tigress, about ten miles off, that I had meant to have left till later on."

"Good gracious!" shrieked Mr. Hinkson, bounding out of his chair. "What's that? A tiger here!"

"It's only my tame panther," I returned, calmly. "It is as quiet as a dog; she follows me everywhere. I have had her ever since she was a kind of kitten. You need not be the least afraid of her!"

"A queer kitten! I don't like the look of her at all; send the brute off!" he cried, excitedly, as pussy, as we called her, began to rub herself against his chair, and then against father's."

"I'll take her away if you like, but she is as tame as any cat. Would you," turning to the two young men, "like to go down the river in the boat, and we will take the panther. She is very fond of going for a row, and she loves music."

To this they agreed without the least hesitation, and soon we three young people were gliding down the Karan.

Mr. Hare rowed, Captain Halford played the guitar, and I sat in the stern, my diamonds flashing in the moonlight, and the panther lying at my feet.

The boat, with music on the river, came into my head as we floated along. Perhaps there was something in dreams after all!

## CHAPTER VI.

The day after our little boating-party father got up some pig-sticking, so-called. It really consists of riding after the wild boar with spears. Disturbed from his lair, among rushes, he darts forth at a tremendous

gallop. It takes a good Arab to keep near him. He doubles, and darts, and turns, and twists, and when at bay or wounded, frequently dashes fiercely at the horse, and rips up his fore legs with his sharp tusks.

Mr. Hinkson and I played the part of spectators on this occasion. He had the assurance to say that "he was looking after me!" as he jogged along on his stout little pony.

Poor though Captain Halford declared himself to be, he owned a splendid Australian horse, and got the first spear. He rode well, and I considered myself no mean judge; he rode as well as father, who was an excellent horseman.

Mr. Jack Hare's performance was so-so, and he was mounted on a galloway that was remarkable for nothing but long legs and a long tail.

After sport there was luncheon, a picnic, a ride home, dinner, songs, chess for the elders, and a row on the river for the young people.

"Now mind, Miss Rance," said Peggy, as she brushed my hair that night, "that you are not to be falling in love with either of those young men. Whatever you do don't do that."

"What an idea, Peg; the last thing I should think of!"

"May be, then, it's not the last thing one of them would think of! One of them might fall—. But whist, I am only talking nonsense. Sure they see dozens of beautiful girls every hour of the day elsewhere."

"So they do. And now which of them do you like the best, Peggy?"

"The young one I think. The captain is the handsomer man, and his singing bates all. I would coax the fish out of the water, but the young one has a lovely smile! It's beautiful!"

"More than you can say for his nose!" I cried. "It's exactly the shape of a parrot's."

"Well! a man is none the worse for having a fine handle to his face, and he is the old fellow's heir, and will have heaps of money."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! them native servants does be terrible gossips. They say the captain is poor, but a very good gentleman, and that the ladies does be very fond of him."

"How do you mean?"

"Writing notes, and asking him to dine, and ride, and come to tea; that's just for his looks. But he can't marry any of them, for he has not got a rap, unless he got a girl with money."

I looked at myself in the glass, and blushed. I was "a girl with money;" and Peggy, who was brushing my hair, noticed blush and look in the mirror. Our eyes met, but we said nothing; under many circumstances, silence is golden. I was not in love with Hugh Halford, but it now occurred to me as a very blinding idea that he might fall in love with me! Why not?

One morning, by starlight, we set out riding, bound for a tiger-hunt. I accompanied the party as a matter of course. I had already seen the death of at least twenty tigers.

Winding in the dim light, in single file, we kept above the bed of the river, pushing our way through wet, dewy jungle, or among brakes of bamboo canes.

As the dawn flickered in the East, and the birds awoke, and the stars closed their eyes, our road became wider. We could ride two abreast, and Captain Halford and I fell to the rear and tried the experiment—rather, I fancied, to Jack Hare's annoyance.

"I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed these few days of civilized jungle life," said my companion. "I am only sorry that we have but three days more; and then back to the realms of society and duty."

"When you will soon forget the queer, wild people you met in the wilderness!" I added.

"Never! I never shall forget. You are not a person that could easily slip from one's memory."



"I! And what shall you remember about me?—that my only claim to manners was my name?"

"I shall remember to my dying day, the first time I saw you, sitting on the balcony of that deserted old palace, gazing down into the garden, with your thoughtful face and golden hair; you looked, as Hare said, just like the princess in a fairy tale."

"Which fairy tale?"

"The one I think with the hedge of thorns, where all the people slept for a hundred years, until a prince came and woke the princess with a kiss."

"And what happened then?"

"Oh! every one started up wide-awake, and the prince took the princess away and married her, and they lived happy ever after in the good old fashion."

"The case is not a parallel at all," I said.

"You must think of another princess—for I was not asleep. No one kissed me, and there was no prince, only three sportsmen."

"Perhaps one of them was a prince in disguise," he returned, lowering his voice.

We were riding very close together along a narrow path, lined with date palms and underwood, and had lost sight of the others.

"Don't let us talk any more nonsense," I said bluntly. "Is this the usual style of conversation in society? Is this the way you talk to other girls—girls at Gurrumpore?"

"No; but then, you see, you are not like other girls."

"No, I am a wilful girl of the jungle—ignorant and unsophisticated. You think you may say what you please to me, don't you?"

"No, Miss Manners, you know that that is very far from what I think. I think, I would to Heaven that other girls were more like you—natural, innocent, and true; unflattered by the divinities of that great Moloch, the world, and his lesser satellites, custom, artificial manners, false morals, false hearts, false faces, false smiles—"

"Why not say false teeth, false hair, and false complexion, when you are about it," said a loud bantering voice, and Mr. Jack Hare came cantering up behind us. "This is no time of day to be pitching into society; trot on, we are now within a quarter of a mile of the first tie up, and we have not a minute to lose."

I must here explain what is meant by a tie up before proceeding further. When a tiger is known to be in a certain district, and has carried off so many cattle, or so many people (especially the aged and infirm), some one betinks them of letting some shooting party know. The shooting party send their Shikari—hunter and gamekeeper rolled into one—who bags half-a-dozen head of cattle, and ties them up, singly, in the most likely places to tempt the tiger, who is pretty sure to kill, and eat, one of them; and after this hearty meal he retires, gorged, to the depths of the jungle to sleep it off. When he is known to have dined, and to have "laid up" in some particular jungle, the word is passed on to the sportsmen, and the jungle is beat by about two hundred coolies, with shouts and yells, and crackers, and squibs; their object being to drive the tiger in a certain direction where the gentlemen are posted up in the trees, ready to pot old stripes as he bounds past—to shoot him on foot is madness, and is never attempted.

Arrangements like small platforms are fastened up in these trees, and called "maichans," are about eighteen feet from the ground, and hold two people.

Father, Mr. Hinkson, and Captain Halford squeezed into one on this occasion, as it was in the best position, and Jack Hare and I were relegated to the other lower and less conspicuous post; in fact, it was a hundred to one if we saw the tiger at all!

A weary wait of nearly two hours elapsed, then sounds of tom toms, fire-works, at first faintly audible, now came nearer, nearer, nearer. At last a kind of crash was heard through the underwood; an orange and black

object sprang out with a bound, and was instantly shot at, and slightly wounded, by Mr. Hinkson, who held his rifle with trembling hands. However, a second shot, almost like a second barrel, came so swiftly from my father's express that the animal rolled over stone dead, with a bullet through his brain. Great excitement now ensued; this noble wild beast, when we all descended cautiously to examine him, measured ten feet six inches, from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail. He looked like a great big cat stretched out upon the short scorched grass.

According to the etiquette of sport, first shot claims the animal, no matter if the wound be but skin deep. The tiger was therefore Mr. Hinkson's lawful spoil; and he was nearly delirious with pride and excitement.

"If there were only a few more to shoot, now I have my hand in!" he cried, vainly gloriously.

The words had scarcely left his lips when one of the native beaters dashed into our little circle and uttered two words—only two—but amply sufficient to scatter us in all directions. These two words were "The tigress!"

How I bounded back into my maichan I know not. This time Captain Halford was my companion. The others had taken to various trees, the nearest to hand, with the maddest haste—and no wonder.

Breathlessly we sat, for fully five minutes. I could distinctly hear the beating of my own heart, and I should not wonder if my partner heard it too, for the maichan was small; and necessity compelled us to sit very close together.

All at once I caught sight of her, as she came stealing through the underwood, just like a great wicked, tawny, cruel cat. She advanced into the open space, looked around her, lashed her tail. Then she gave a roar that shook the very woods, and then she became aware of the dead body of her lord and master. She approached it stealthily, smelt all around it in dead silence, and then her roars were appalling to hear—lamentation and frenzy combined. Next she began to sniff eagerly about, presumably for us! Mr. Hinkson, who had sought refuge in a tree close to ours, dropped his rifle, so amazing was his terror. This performance brought the enraged animal nearly opposite to us. Captain Halford drew a long breath, and was about to fire, when he was anticipated by Jack Hare, who wounded her in the shoulder. The shot knocked her over; and she rolled upon the ground, tearing at the wound with her teeth.

Then she got up again and looked fiercely about her. Suddenly she caught sight of us; and with a countenance that was literally diabolical in expression, and a roar in keeping, she came straight at our tree and rather fragile maichan with a bound that could only be possible to a maddened, wounded tigress. She sprang: she reached our little platform with her fore claws. Another effort, and she would be beside—between us. Our lives might be counted now by seconds. I trembled like an aspen leaf, conscious of those great yellow claws, those yellow eyes, that hot breath within a yard of me.

Luckily, Captain Halford was cool; if he had dropped his rifle it would have been a bad business. Leaning down promptly, though his face was rather white, he planted both barrels to her forehead, and fired that second. She fell back dead, carrying the maichan and us with her in her fall.

There we lay for a moment a confused mass. At length, when we extricated ourselves, we discovered the tigress, of course, and Captain Halford with an injured knee, the maichan in pieces, myself scathless.

It had been an exciting ten minutes, but now it was all over. Two splendid tigers—one the prey of Mr. Hinkson, the other of Jack Hare, though they had killed neither—were a grand bag. The beaters were assembled and paid, coolies appointed to carry home the sport—twelve to each animal—and with tom-tom beating proudly before us, we started home-

wards at the head of quite a triumphal procession.

Captain Halford made light of his hurt, and once more rode beside me. After discussing our recent adventure in all its bearings, he said,—

"To think that to-morrow will be my very last day! Shall you be glad to be rid of us?"

"No—very sorry. Your visit has been a great event to us, greater than you would believe. When you go back to civilization, don't forget us altogether."

"Forget you!" he began impetuously. "Miss Manners, you tempt me to say things that—that I have no right to say to you."

What could he mean? Of course I could not possibly ask him, and we rode along in silence for nearly half a mile. At length I spoke again, and said,—

"You remember saying that there was something strange about me, something remarkable, the first time you saw me. You promised to tell me what it was, and you have never done so yet."

"And you wish me to fulfil my promise now?"

"Yes, please; though I may seem the most inquisitive girl you ever met."

"Have you no idea what it is that would make you remarkable amongst hundreds, much less here in this unappreciative wilderness?"

"Not the faintest notion."

"And must I keep a rash promise, and tear the veil from your eyes, which are far better as they are?" looking full into them as he spoke.

"Yes, my curiosity is unbearable. I must and will know what is so remarkable about me."

"Your appearance—your face. In short," seeing that I was going to question him most anxiously, "in short—your beauty."

"Beauty! Am I beautiful, am I pretty?"

"Yes. Am I the first who has ever told you so?"

"Of course you are; and I believe you are joking. Now, are you not?"

"On my honour I am not. When you turned round and looked at us that time in the old palace I got quite a start, for such a face as yours I had never seen in all my life, save in my dreams. Pretty girls there are in plenty, but you are something more than that."

"Am I? And what is the good of it to me here?"

"Not much. But beauty is a great gift—the greatest, or properly speaking, the most powerful that a woman can possess. Some day you will be glad of your beauty for somebody's sake!" And here he looked straight before him, rather grimly, and said, "We had better be jogging on. Don't let my bruises and cuts be an impediment to our pace; they are really nothing."

So saying, he started off at a sharp canter, and never once spoke to me till we were dismounting at home.

That evening we were all too exhausted for any exertion; the elders did not play chess, nor the juveniles boat.

We sat out above the river, in the moonlight, and Captain Halford was induced to sing several Spanish and English ballads, whilst we listened amongst all the appropriate surroundings, to such a voice.

The last song he sang I remember well—but too well. It had a strange, haunting air, and as he began it he looked straight at me, and then across the river, from which point of view he never again moved his eyes till the last line had died away on the warm-scented air.

The words, as well as I can recollect them, were these:—

"Have you forgot the garden where we met?  
It all depends! You know it all depends!  
We were alone midst roses dewy wet,  
The best of friends—the dearest friends."

The sun had set too soon, her weary way  
Down the dark lane a maiden wends;  
Will she return there, when I wait some day?  
It all depends! It all depends!

"How soft the night! Can you recall the hour  
It all depends! Hush! dear, it all depends!  
Across your window in the ruined tower  
A jasmine bends—so fondly bends!  
Hark to her voice, dim, silence to despair  
Deep music lends—so sweetly lends  
When shall I see her face, her hand, her hair?  
It all depends! It all depends!

"How will it end! In sorrow or in pain?  
It all depends, sweetheart! It all depends!  
We may be parted, we may meet again,  
It all depends! It all depends!  
Life such as ours, may be so false, or true,  
So fondly false. It all depends!  
Tell me once more! I can be true—can you?  
It all depends! It all depends!"

My heart beat very fast as I listened to this song, especially fast in the last verse.

I had the egotistic vanity to take some of the lines to myself, and my eyes could scarcely see for tears, so I kept them resolutely turned away from my companion's, and fixed upon the dim horizon for fully five minutes.

When I looked round once more Captain Halford's chair was only occupied by my guitar, and he was gone.

(To be continued.)

## HIS QUAKER BRIDE.

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### CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

"I SHALL endeavour to realise your expectations, any way. Of course, while I am on probation, as it were, I may come to Penwyr as often as I can spare the time?"

"Yes, oh, yes! Penwyr will seem a different place when you are there," said the girl gladly. "I little thought when I came to London what a great bewildering happiness was in store for me."

"Say for us both. Ruth, we really have a lot to thank Algy Cavendish for. There isn't a better little fellow going. But for him I might not have succeeded in winning Mr. Ephraim Barclay, and regaining Aunt Rachael's confidence."

"I am very, very grateful to him. He is coming here this afternoon. Aunt Rachael invited him. In her quiet way she is just as pleased to know that you have such a friend. Oh, and Marie Benquier is coming to tea as well. I have not told you about her, poor thing."

"Who is she?"

Ruth acquainted him with the young Frenchwoman's history, in so far as she knew it herself.

"She has nearly a dozen pupils already, and Aunt Rachael is very kind to her. She often spends the evening with us. Is it not sad for her to be in such uncertainty with regard to her husband's fate?"

"Very, if her story is a true one. You cannot be too careful as to the people with whom you form acquaintance in London, Ruth. Impostors abound, and—"

"Oh, I am quite sure that poor Maria is a lady, that she has told us the simple truth about herself," said Ruth earnestly. "You will see her presently and be able to form your own opinion. I hope so much, if he is alive, that she will succeed in finding her husband."

Aunt Rachael and the tea-tray came in together at this moment, and Algy Cavendish's subsequent arrival brought the *tit-a-tit* to an end.

Algy was languidly discussing the merits of a new book with the old Quakeress. Val was helping or hindering Ruth in her task of

pouring out tea when the door opened softly, and Marie Benquier entered.

The Frenchwoman looked strikingly handsome in her sombre black dress, enlivened here and there by a vivid gleam of maize-colour. As her flashing dark eyes travelled swiftly round the room, noting each occupant, they rested at length upon Val Curzon.

Ruth, turning to greet her with a smile, saw Marie's great mournful eyes dilated to their fullest extent, while her face was working convulsively as she strove to speak.

"Why, Marie!" she began in alarm. What—

She stopped abruptly as the Frenchwoman, with a wild sobbing cry, darted suddenly forward and flung her arms round Val Curzon's neck.

"My husband! oh, my husband! I have found you at last!" she exclaimed, brokenly, in mingled accents of love and upbraiding. "What had I done that you should desert me so cruelly?"

Recovering from his momentary astonishment, Val freed himself from her embrace, and regarded the others inquiringly.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, angrily. "Is she mad? I have never seen her before. She is a perfect stranger to me."

"It is false!" cried Marie Benquier, turning upon him with true foreign passion. "Monster of meanness, will you actually dare to disown me—your wife—whom you deserted two years ago in Paris? That ever I should have loved a man so worthless, so contemptible! Why did you marry me if you cared so little for me? Before all present I declare you to be my husband, Valentine Curzon."

"Paris again!" ejaculated Val, with a groan. "There is a regular conspiracy against me in that direction! Ruth, Algy, Aunt Rachael, I am willing to swear that this lady is not my wife, that I know nothing of her."

Algy looked grave. Even his faith in Val had suffered a severe shock. He knew not what to think.

Aunt Rachael was leaning over Ruth, who had sunk down upon the sofa, her face hidden in her trembling hands.

"He lies!" retorted Marie Benquier, her dark eyes flashing fire, her love converted into sudden hatred. "Were we not married at the church of St. Sulpice? Did we not live together on the outskirts of Paris for six months in the villa that you had hired, *miserable*? Yet you have forgotten it all, you refuse to recognise me! Oh, it is too much. I wonder that I do not kill you where you stand."

"I can only repeat what I have already said," rejoined Val, doggedly. "Good Heaven, can my double be going about the world somewhere, bringing all this misery upon me? I can account for it in no other way. Madam, you are either an adventuress or the victim of a mistake. Once for all, I swear that you are not my wife, that I have never seen you until to-day."

Then Aunt Rachael raised herself and spoke.

"Nephew, leave us at once," she said, sternly. "I will listen to no vindication. Ephraim Barclay was right when he warned us against you. Go, and never dare to return."

"Ruth, you at least believe in me still," cried the young fellow, wildly. "You will not condemn me unheard?"

But Ruth made no reply. Marie Benquier's claim upon Val had broken her faith in him, and well-nigh broken her heart also.

### CHAPTER IX.

EPHRAIM BARCLAY was in the midst of his packing when the subjoined note reached him from Rachael Hargrave:—

"DEAR FRIEND,—Kindly forget my reproachful words of this morning. I have, alas! every reason to believe in the truthfulness of

the accusation brought against my nephew. Something has transpired to rob me of all confidence in him. Ruth is ill, poor child, and I desire to return at once to Penwyr. Come to us at once, for we stand sadly in need of the firm friendship that I regret should ever have been interrupted by one so unworthy as Valentine Curzon."

Astonished, hopeful, at a loss to think what could have happened in so short a time to occasion such a radical change of opinion, Ephraim rushed into his hat and coat, and drove to Verney-street without losing a moment.

Ruth was not visible when he got there. Aunt Rachael informed him of what had occurred, her fine old face expressive of stern sorrow and regret.

She believed Val to be guilty now of all that had been brought against him. Her heart was full of just indignation, that he should have dared to make love to Ruth, being, as Marie Benquier confidently alleged, a married man.

She did not accuse Algy Cavendish of any attempt to deceive her. Algy had evidently been deceived himself. Had he not gone away without saying a word in his friend's favour, after witnessing that disgraceful scene?

If Ruth recovered from the shock of such a bitter awakening, never would she, Rachael Hargrave, tempt fate by bringing her to London again.

"My niece is quite prostrate," said the old lady, sadly. "I should like to get her home at once. She cannot bear Marie Benquier—I should say Mrs. Curzon—to go near her. Yet she is not to be blamed. All this misery has been wrought by her husband, as she persists in calling him. She has even shown me her marriage certificate; she could not possibly have forged that! And it is Miriam's son—my favourite nephew—who has acted thus!"

"What can I do to hasten thy departure?" asked Ephraim, pitying her distress, yet in no wise sorry to hear that Val Curzon had met his Nemesis in the shape of an angry, deserted wife.

Ephraim, after the snubbing and loss he had undergone, would have been more or less than human had he experienced no pleasure in the downfall of his rival, and the vindication of his own honour, with regard to the truthfulness of the Parisian story.

Now, perhaps, these foolish women would see and recognize that honest truth was more valuable and lasting than the showy surface qualities of a man like Val Curzon.

Aunt Rachael gave him a few commissions, and seemed greatly relieved when he promised to take her and Ruth home to Penwyr by the first train on the following morning.

Ephraim Barclay went away, building castles in the air, from the windows of which Ruth's sweet face looked out and smiled upon him. He would win her yet. That scoundrel, Val Curzon, had only come between them for awhile. Ere six months had passed, Ruth, he told himself in sober gladness, would have become Mrs. Barclay.

Aunt Rachael stayed up later than usual to finish her packing. She could not persuade Ruth to rouse herself from the stupor into which she had fallen. The girl seemed heart-broken, incapable of any exertion.

All her love and trust had been slain at one blow. She dared not think of Val save with feelings of bitterest reproach and indignation. How could he have insulted her thus shamefully, winning the pure gold of her love and giving her only finsel in return? Oh! if death would but come to her relief and mercifully deliver her from the blank dreary future that she feared to contemplate.

The vacant look in her eyes made Aunt Rachael nervous. She trembled for the girl's mind. When Ephraim Barclay drove up in the cab that was to carry them to the station the sight of his honest, good-natured face reassured the old Quakeress a little. She felt that she was not left alone in her trouble.



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"Good-bye, my dear!" she said kindly to Marie Benquier, who had passed the night in passionate weeping. "I do not blame you for what has occurred. Write to me ere long, and let me know if my nephew has at least the grace to acknowledge you as his wife. There is no reason now why he should refuse to do so. He cannot possibly undergo a more complete exposure!"

"I will never live with him again—never!" answered the Frenchwoman, vehemently. "He has caused me too much misery, and I am also, *chère madame*!"

Meanwhile, the leading villain in this little domestic drama was as miserably perplexed and bewildered as his worst enemy could have wished him to be.

That some connecting link existed between Ephraim Barclay's accusation and Marie Benquier's strange conduct in claiming him as her husband, Val Curzon felt certain.

Was there some vile conspiracy against him, the young man wondered, in fierce, impatient anger? Had he an enemy who was working only to well in blackening his character and estranging all his friends from him?

If so Ephraim Barclay was not the man. He had accused him in good faith, believing truly in his own story.

There was no collusion between the Quaker and Marie Benquier. Each had acted independently of the other in bringing such serious charges against him.

"Even Algy has thrown me over," thought Val, miserably. "That confounded Frenchman's story proved too much for him. He lost all confidence in me; he is ready to suspect the worst. And Ruth, what will she suffer in mind, my poor darling, until I unravel this mystery that has wound round me! In her opinion I must be the basest villain unhung. If I suffer my thoughts to dwell upon her I shall go mad! I have such exquisite happiness snatched away from me for the second time! Shall I ever succeed in discovering the man who has wrought me so much harm? I must; life would become unendurable passed under such cruel stigma, apart from Ruth! Yet how not to about establishing my innocence I know not, since my double—whoever he may be—lives in the dark. I have no clue to him!" Jack and Migs could gain no answering word or look from their master when they came about him as usual, expecting to be rebuffed.

Dejected and unhappy, Val sat in his easy chair, smoking endless cigars, and thinking deeply.

Algy Cavendish did not come near him. This wounded Val deeply. It was tantamount to an expression of belief in his guilt. Surely Algy might have known him better than to credit the Frenchwoman's assertion!

"Does he deem me guilty upon both charges, I wonder?" mused Val. "In for a penny in for a pound. He evidently believes that black and tarter to be my wife. I'm awfully thankful that she's nothing of the kind. I may be an idiot in some respects, but I could never lose my head sufficiently to marry such a woman, a tragic muse, capable of great things in the vituperative line. How she turned upon me when I declared her statement to be either a mistake or a falsehood! And my name—she'd got it so pat! I wonder—why, what a fool I must be not to have thought of that before!"

Springing to his feet as a fresh idea occurred to him, Val Curzon paced excitedly up and down the room, the dogs watching him gravely, as if they were more than half doubted their master's sanity.

"Foregone conclusions are a mistake," he muttered, presently, pausing in his rapid walk, and turning over some old letters that had lain undisturbed in his desk for years.

"His fate was uncertain, admitting of boundless conjecture; and then the likeness, the close resemblance, how is that to be explained? Such things have happened, and

my surmise is the only one that throws any light upon the mystery!"

"Should it prove incorrect I shall once more be at a dead standstill. At any rate it is worth acting upon. Now to think of the means of snaring my bird, supposing him to exist. I must be cautious lest I alarm him, and thus ruin my last chance of clearing my name from all aspersion. Thank Heaven for sending me the idea, although it has come late in the day. It involves immediate action and, failing that, I should be sadly in need of a strait waistcoat."

At the risk of compromising himself to a greater extent by treating her claim upon him seriously, Val Curzon went to Verney-street and had an interview with Marie Benquier, his self-dubbed wife.

Marie's mood was at first stormy, but it gradually calmed down as she listened to what Val had to say.

In return she supplied him with some valuable information. When Val left her he was in a far more hopeful frame of mind.

Resisting a strong impulse to call upon Algy Cavendish, Val told the cabman to drive to the office of his solicitors, Messrs Greymarsh and Dibble.

"I won't go near the little beggar till I have placed myself beyond suspicion," he resolved defiantly. "Then it will be my turn to sport the cold shoulder."

Val's interview with Mr. Greymarsh, the senior partner, was a long one. At parting the solicitor shook hands with the young man warmly.

"It is a wretched position for you to be placed in," he remarked condolingly; "and one quite unprecedented so far as my experience goes. Never mind, have patience, and we shall lay the rod on the right shoulders yet, and clear you from every imputation. You will remain in town for the next month or so, that we may be able to communicate with you, should occasion arise, at once."

Val went home and forwarded a carefully-worded advertisement, drawn up by Mr. Greymarsh and himself, to each of the principal English, French, and American daily papers, said advertisement to be repeated for an indefinite period, should it fail at once to produce any result.

Having done all that was in his power, Val Curzon waited like a spider within his web, waiting for the arrival of the unwary fly, only without the spider's patience.

It was well-nigh maddening to think of Ruth far away at Penwy, not radiant with love and happiness as he had seen her, but pale and drooping, silently reproaching him as the cause of all her misery.

Aunt Rachael and Ephraim Barclay would doubtless paint him in the darkest colours as a worthless dishonourable adventurer, who had won her love only to play with it, and then cast it from him like a broken toy.

And Ruth would believe them! How could she do otherwise? Marie Benquier's declaration had proved too much for Ruth's faith, strong as it had been. Since another woman had claimed Val as her husband, how could she, a pure innocent girl, continue to repose trust and confidence in him?

The advertisement was duly inserted, yet it failed to evoke any reply. Some time after Val waited at the office of Greymarsh and Dibble, only to be told that they had no good news for him.

"What can I do if the advertisement proves a dead failure?" asked Val, impatiently, of Mr. Greymarsh.

"I really don't know! You see, the affair is of such an exceptional nature that it admits of no ordinary measures," was the unsatisfactory reply. "We may, for aught we can tell, be advertising for a dead man! In that case, our policy—pardon the joke—must indeed be regarded as a dead failure. Still, we must persevere for the present. I certainly shall not despair of gaining a reply for the next three weeks at least. It will be time enough then, failing any result, to decide what fresh action we can take in the matter."

All very well for old Greymarsh to preach patience; he was not in love. Val went moodily away, half inclined to run down to Penwy, and see Ruth at any cost.

"She would only turn away from me, though," he reflected, miserably; "and that would be more than I could stand! Poor little Ruth! I wonder how she bears it? I hope that fellow Barclay isn't boring her with his hateful attentions. It's comforting to know that she will never accept him under any circumstances. Yet he can see her every day if he likes, while I, through no fault of my own, am practically banished as a black sheep and a Parish. Oh! I can't endure this sort of thing much longer. I'll go to Paris and conduct my own investigations. I'll find the fellow whose shortcomings have been accredited to me if he is above ground, and make him suffer for it. By Jove, I'll make him smart when I do come across him, or my name isn't Val Curzon!"

## CHAPTER X.

If one of Algy Cavendish's diplomatic ventures had proved a failure, the other promised to reward him amply for all the trouble he had taken. His investigations with regard to Mrs. Whycherley would, when revealed, effectually prevent Colonel Fitz-Markham from making her his wife—at least so Algy firmly believed.

This being the case, Aurelia's gratitude might safely be reckoned upon. She would necessarily entertain a high opinion of Algy's skill and keenness which had enabled him to discover and lay bare the charming widow's carefully-concealed family skeleton.

But for the hope of inducing Aurelia to accept him as a lover, and to regard his advances with more favour than she did those of other men, Algy would not have troubled himself in the matter. Apart from Aurelia the Colonel might have fallen a victim to Mrs. Whycherley or any other middle-aged syren for all that Algy cared.

His object in preserving that gallant old warrior from matrimonial toils was that he might induce Aurelia to become entangled in them herself—a very difficult and delicate task.

Algy was feeling annoyed and disappointed with Val Curzon's complicated position.

His success in the Whycherley affair hardly compensated him for the loss of faith in his old friend that had ensued upon Marie Benquier's declaration, and the part he had been induced to play as mediator, while in the belief that Val was a cruelly columnated man.

Inclined to think that Marie Benquier was really Val's wife, Algy knew not where to stop when judging his quondam friend.

A man who could keep his marriage a secret, and subsequently desert his wife, might be capable of doing anything else that was mean and dishonourable.

Algy regretted his eloquent pleading in Val's behalf, since it was by no means unlikely that he had really fomented the duel and circulated the false notes as stated by Ephraim Barclay. That he should have warmly defended such a scoundrel annoyed the little man beyond measure. Val's prolonged absence, his complete silence, served to strengthen Algy's worst suspicions concerning him.

If he were innocent, would he not come boldly forward and give the lie to his accusers? Metaphorically, Algy Cavendish washed his hands of Val, not without a feeling of keen regret that he should have proved so unworthy.

He went to Curzon-street one morning when his plan was ripe for action, to call upon Colonel and Miss Fitz-Markham. Fortune favoured him, for the Colonel—of whom he was especially in quest—happened to be at home.

"I hardly know what to do with myself to-day!" he remarked, incontinently, as he rose

to go. "So many fellows have left town that the usual haunts seem quite deserted. I should like to run down to Brighton if I'd only got a companion. Colonel, won't you take pity on me and say you'll go?"

"I don't mind if I do," replied that gentleman, always ready for anything in the shape of an outing. Besides, there was something flattering to his vanity in Algy's request.

He could not be such a desperate old fogey since a young fellow like Algy Cavendish was desirous of his society.

The Colonel's boyish, mercurial temperament rose at the idea of a delightful day and a nice little dinner at a fashionable hotel—a dinner at which Aurelia would not be present. He got himself ready to accompany Algy with alacrity.

"What frivolous beings you men are!" said Aurelia, calmly, as she went on making up some club accounts during her father's temporary absence from the room. "You think of nothing but your own pleasure!"

"We are a frivolous set, I admit!" replied Algy. "The real business of life is, of course, managed by women. I have a reason, though, for asking the Colonel to go to Brighton with me to-day!"

Aurelia looked up quickly.

"Is your reason in any way connected with Mrs. Whycherley?" she asked.

"Yes! it bears directly upon her!"

"But she is not at Brighton," said Aurelia. "She is in South Wales. Papa has actually received letters from her. His infatuation is on the increase, I am sorry to say."

"Do you know if he has actually promised to marry her?" inquired Algy, anxiously.

"No, I don't think it has gone quite so far, although it very soon will!"

"To-day's experience may induce the Colonel to beat a retreat and remain a widower," said Algy, confidently. "You will pardon me for not satisfying your curiosity more completely now. To-morrow I promise to tell you everything, and I do not think you will blame me for what I have done."

"I will stay at home to-morrow morning, then, until you call!" said Aurelia, graciously. "You are putting my patience to a cruel test, Mr. Cavendish; but I have every confidence in you. What you propose doing at Brighton though," she continued, wondering, "I can't imagine!"

The Colonel was in high spirits when they reached that popular watering-place. Algy immediately struck out for the Parade as if he meant business.

"Now we are here we may as well call upon Mrs. Whycherley, Colonel," he said, airily. "Charming woman, Mrs. Whycherley; very fortunate in her family connections, which are, to say the least of them, extensive."

The Colonel looked bewildered.

"Mrs. Whycherley is in South Wales at the present moment with a party of friends," he replied, quickly. "I believe that her family connections are quite satisfactory, quite!"

"Oh, of course! But with regard to Mrs. Whycherley's present whereabouts you have been misinformed, Colonel. She is lodging at a house on the Parade, and she's sure to ask us to stay to luncheon. Come along."

"It's very strange; very strange, indeed!" muttered the Colonel, uneasily. "I could have sworn that she was in South Wales. Do you know how long she has been here, Mr. Cavendish?"

"About a fortnight, I believe," said Algy, carelessly, thereby increasing the Colonel's bewilderment.

Mrs. Whycherley had left town only a fortnight ago. Therefore, if Algy Cavendish were to be relied upon, she had not been to South Wales at all. And yet those letters? Surely such a charming woman had not been guilty of falsehood and deceit!

"This is the house," said Algy, in his cool, collected way. "Mrs. Whycherley at luncheon!" he continued, in answer to the servant's infor-

mation. "Never mind, take our cards in; she will not refuse to see us."

Following close upon the servant's heels to render escape or excuse impossible, Algy entered a dingy, close-smelling back-parlour, followed by the wondering and uneasy Colonel.

Awful and unexpected sight to meet the eyes of an ardent, elderly lover! There, at the head of a long table sat Mrs. Whycherley, his goddess, whom he had fondly imagined to be without incumbrances of any kind, dispensing boiled mutton and rice pudding to no less than nine olive branches—four boys and five girls—healthy, hearty youngsters, who bore a strong resemblance to their mother!

Mrs. Whycherley uttered a little scream as her visitors entered the room, and sank back in her chair. Algy was quite equal to the occasion. The Colonel merely steadied himself against the wall and gasped.

"How do, Mrs. Whycherley?" said Algy, with languid grace, enjoying the scene immensely. "Awfully sorry to disturb you at luncheon, but having run down from town for the day Colonel Fitz-Markham and I couldn't possibly resist the temptation of calling upon you."

By this time Mrs. Whycherley had recovered her self-possession. She could not deny her family, since the boys and girls were all sitting round, listening intently. She could not prevent the Colonel from detecting the deceit of which she had been guilty in concealing their existence from him. It only remained to wear a bold front, and look the unpleasant situation fairly in the face.

"Delighted to see you!" she replied, with rather a ghastly smile. "These are my boys and girls—all home for the holidays. May I ask you to share our simple meal?"

"You are very kind, but we have already lunched," rejoined the Colonel, stiffly, telling a deliberate fib, and glaring at the assembled youngsters as if they were responsible for their mother's shortcomings. "I was not aware, Mrs. Whycherley, that you had such a large family!"

"Did I never tell you their exact number?" said the widow, sweetly, as her hope of one day becoming Mrs. Fitz-Markham vanished into thin air.

"No, by Jove! no. I can't remember so much as an allusion to them," retorted the angry Colonel. "I—I was given to understand that you were in South Wales?"

"I was there," corrected Mrs. Whycherley; "but I came back to Brighton to be with the children during their holidays, poor darlings."

The Colonel grunted; he knew her statement to be a false one. To tell the truth, Mrs. Whycherley had never been farther than Brighton. Her letters had been forwarded to a friend in South Wales to give credence to her story—hence the postmark.

"How nice for you to have them all with you!" said Algy, quietly.

Mrs. Whycherley turned upon him, with fierce resentment shining in her eyes.

She had noticed Algy's devotion to Aurelia Fitz-Markham, and—aware of Aurelia's dislike for her—she came rapidly to the conclusion that Algy had been instrumental in bringing the Colonel down upon her and ruining her chance of becoming Mrs. Fitz-Markham.

"How did you know that I was here?" she asked, icily, striving hard to keep her temper and hide the mortification she felt.

"Oh! a friend of mine told me!" said Algy, "and of course the Colonel insisted upon calling. You know how determined he is, Mrs. Whycherley, but very pleasant withal. Your children are taking to him already!"

They were certainly taking liberties which the Colonel did not seem much to relish.

Master Jim wanted to examine his watch, while Miss Mary trod upon his toes in her infantine attempt to gain a kiss.

(To be continued.)

## THE BETROTHAL WALK.

—O—

In the cool shadows of the wood,  
Her soft hand resting on my arm,  
We loitered, where the solitude  
Threw over us its quiet charm.

A tender light shone from her eye,  
The violet's modest pleading look;  
Or as, in June, the deep-blue sky  
Makes bluer still the tranquil brook.

Far down the forest's green arcade  
We found a rustic vine-clad seat,  
Where whiffs of wind with swallows played,  
And where the watery blooms were sweet.

There sitting, hemmed in leafy frame,  
Our thoughts moved on to tenderness;  
The long withheld question came;  
What words I spoke—well may you guess!

The faint blush ripened on her cheek;  
In shyness fell her violet eye;  
So soft her voice, her head bent meek,  
I know you guess her low reply!

All nature wore a livelier grace;  
And, bending over us, the tree  
Was first to kiss the upturned face  
Of Celia—as though bantering me.

The swallows thicker flew, and proud  
To flash before us and be gone;  
The rushes, like an orient crowd,  
Bowed low toward our sylvan throne.

The wild brook found a voice of cheer,  
And trilled along in melody;  
The lily bent her list'ning ear  
To catch the music flowing by.

We lingered in the shadows late;  
Above us curved the faint new moon,  
And followed to her cottage gate—  
Our happiest morn will dawn in June.

J. B. C.

## VERNON'S DESTINY.

—O:—

### CHAPTER IX.

LORD CHARTERIS was not far from eighty, but clear-headed and with all his faculties, was that the weight of years had somewhat dimmed his sight. He lived all the year round now at his old estate in Gloucestershire, which he dearly loved.

His grandsons made their home with him, and a goodly sprinkling of granddaughters as well, so that the household at Charteris Hall was a very numerous one, and the relationships of the family to each other not a little puzzling.

Charteris itself was strictly entailed, and must pass with the title to the old lord's eldest son, who was stationed at Ceylon with his regiment, in which his two boys already held commissions.

This branch of the family was little known in Gloucester. Tom Charteris had barely spent a year at home since he was twenty. He had married a high-born heiress, and led an exemplary life. Taken altogether, his relations were intensely proud of him, but stood a little in awe of his many virtues.

The next son had been "unfortunate," that was the chronicle of him in the family annals. The eldest nieces and nephews could just remember him, and recall the time when he was a frequent visitor at the Hall. Now his name was never mentioned, and it was generally supposed he was dead.

Dr. Charteris, the third son, lived in the village, and his children were the idols of the place. If only Neil, the eldest son, had been his grandfather's heir, there would have been public rejoicings; but the cousins in Ceylon



quite shut out Neil from all such chances; and as he had followed in his father's footsteps, and was now his duly qualified assistant, making his home chiefly at the Hall, where his eldest sister was housekeeper, and a tribe of cousins looked up to him as an elder brother.

"Meg," said Mr. Charteris one day, meeting his sister in the village, "there's been an awful railway accident. I am just off to the station; the father is there already."

"I had better come with you," said Meg, who was a born nurse; "you are sure to want help."

"I want something more. It is five miles to a hospital; don't you think his lordship would let me turn some of the empty rooms at the Hall into an accident ward?"

Meg shook her head.

"I don't think so; he is so particular about Charteris, and what guests it receives."

"Well, I mean to ask him. I have sent up the mother to plead for us. Now, Meg, are you sure you can stand it? It's pretty bad, they say."

"Yes," returned Margaret, quietly; "I am quite ready. You had better accept my help, Neil, for you will get no other unless you send for a hospital nurse; all the women here good for anything have their hands full. Where was the accident?"

"In the tunnel; but they will have brought the sufferers on to Charteris station."

In perfect silence the brother and sister walked on. Their father met them in the looking-office; the crowd made way for them to pass. Very loyal was the feudal respect paid by the whole village to the honoured man of Charteris.

"This is the worst," said the doctor, hurriedly; "look here, Neil, see to these two."

Two still forms lay on the table of the ladies' waiting-room—a man and a girl. They had been found in a senseless heap, half smothered by the debris of the carriage.

Meg took some water and a sponge, and began to bathe the girl's white brow, and chafe the ice-cold hands.

A start from her brother made her look up.

"Gay Vernon, by all that's wonderful! Meg, don't you pity Lady Decima?"

"Yes, Neil. You must restore him for her sake."

"I'll do my best. This destroys the father's theory that the two were travelling together. Vernon hates all women, and he has no relations except his mother. They must have met casually. I'm afraid he is badly hurt."

"You must send him to the Hall. Grandfather likes the Vernons. He will be delighted to welcome one of them."

"And the girl?"

"She must come too, I can't give her up. Something in her face touches me, and she is quite alone."

"Feel in her pocket, and see if there is no clue to her identity. Her friends may be in an agony of suspense about her."

Meg obeyed. She produced a handkerchief marked 'Lit' in white embroidery, and a letter addressed to Miss Travers, Beauville-sur-Mer.

Neil shook his head.

"I don't know the name of Travers at all. Perhaps she was a stranger, poor child!"

"See," said Meg, eagerly, "she is coming."

The dark eyes opened slowly, and fixed themselves on Meg with a gaze of most piteous intensity.

"Oh, let me go!" pleaded Lit; "let me go, or I shall be too late to save Miss Charteris."

She sank back then; the brief gleam of consciousness was over, and she had relapsed into a death-like swoon.

Meg and her brother exchanged glances.

"What can it mean?"

"I thought we were the only Charterises in England, and she spoke of 'saving Miss

Charteris.' There was such an agony in her voice I could not doubt her word; it is an enigma."

"I am Miss Charteris," said Meg, in a bewildered tone, "and I am in no danger, Neil."

"I think she had better be taken to the Hall. It is just possible Vernon may know who she is when he comes to his senses, and I don't like the poor child to be taken off to a strange hospital."

But long before Sir Guy could be questioned poor Lit's identity was discovered. Major Merton's telegram of inquiry described his sister-in-law too minutely for any mistake.

"She is Miss Travers, and she was going to Chesham to visit her sister, Mrs. Merton. You'd better keep the last fact to yourself, Meg. I don't know the reason, but our respected grandfather has a peculiar antipathy to the name of Merton."

"He's an old Indian officer. I think he was Uncle Charles's friend, and mixed up in his disappearance. Anyway, Meg, don't mention the name before Lord Charteris. It is like showing red to a mad bull, and it's cruel to excite men, at his time of life."

"But if he questions me?"

"Say our patient is a Miss Travers, a young lady who came from France on a visit to her married sister. That will quite content him."

"Do you think Miss Travers in danger?"

"No, and I have sent word to that effect to her brother-in-law, but I am uneasy about her. Meg, there is some strange oppression on the brain."

Meg sat up with the patient that night, and she felt Neil was right. There were two or three fitful returns to consciousness, and in each the poor girl spoke of her fear she should be "too late"; in each she pleaded to be "let go, or she could never save Miss Charteris for Sir Guy."

"My dear," said Meg, bending over her, and speaking soothingly, as though to a fractious child, "you are making a mistake. I am Miss Charteris, and no danger threatens me; I am quite safe!"

Lit's eyes wandered over the calm, still face.

"You are not Nell Charteris," she said, gravely, "not the Nell I have promised to save from peril. She has blue eyes, and she is like a child, and I think Sir Guy loves her."

Meg thought she was on the track of a mystery, but even as she watched the light of reason faded out of Lit's eyes, and before she spoke again Miss Charteris knew she was delirious. At the first dawn of day the doctor came to see how it fared with his patient. He and Neil had spent the night with Sir Guy; the other injured passengers had been removed either to their own homes or the nearest hospital; the father and son had only these two cases left on their hands.

"Brain fever," was his prompt verdict, "and it will go badly with her, for she is half worn out now with anxiety. Major Merton is a rich man, but I should be inclined to say poverty had something to do with reducing Miss Travers to this state of weakness."

"Shall you send for him?"

"I think not. A brother-in-law is not a very near relation, and if I summoned him Miss Travers would have to be moved from here. My father would never forgive me if I allowed Major Merton or his family to cross the threshold of Charteris Hall."

"But, Meg, how have they injured grandpapa to make him hate them so?"

"He never saw them in his life, and—but I can't explain it to you, Meg. You must do the best you can for this poor child. I don't suppose she has ever heard the name of Charteris, so she is quite innocent of offending his lordship."

"She has heard it. Father, what do you think were her first words?"

"How can I guess?"

"Let me go, or I shall be too late to save Miss Charteris. I told her I was Miss Char-

teris, but she shook her head, and said, 'you are not Nell; she has blue eyes and golden hair.'"

"I daresay she has."

"Papa!" cried Meg, "what do you mean? You speak almost as though there was such a person as Nell Charteris."

"So there is."

"Papa!"

"And if Miss Travers is mixed up with her I would have out off my right hand sooner than have brought her here. If your grandfather hears the name he will work himself into a passion, and at his age it might be fatal. You will need to be very cautious, Meg."

"I will; but, papa, can you trust me?"

"I do, implicitly."

"But I want to know who Nell Charteris is, and if she is any relation to us?"

"Why ask such questions, Meg? You will never see Nell Charteris, and Miss Travers once gone, probably never hear the name again."

"But I want to understand it, papa."

"You are a true daughter of Eve, but I can trust you, Meg. Nell Charteris is the only child of my late brother Charles."

"I never knew uncle Charles was married."

"He married," then paused, "someone his family could not acknowledge, and the match made him an alien from us. Ask no more questions, Meg; the subject is a sore one."

"But, papa—"

"Meg, do let well alone."

"I must ask you two things."

"Well?"

"May I tell her?"

"If you like."

"And can this Nell Charteris be in any danger? Because, to hear Miss Travers speak, makes one think that she is in some awful peril."

"It is only the poor child's disordered imagination. Don't trouble your head about it, dear."

"I won't!" said Meg, staunchly; but it is a promise easier made than kept, for all through the long hours in the sick-room her thoughts would wander to that other daughter of the house of Charteris who, for her mother's sins, was an alien from her kindred, her very name unknown among them.

She would listen to poor Lit's ravings until she fancied she almost understood the story.

Isola (who Isola might be Meg had no idea) was cruel and reckless; she meant to sacrifice Nell to Rex, and only Lit or Sir Guy could prevent it.

But for that promise to her father, but for the strange way in which their history was linked with that of the unknown Nell, Meg would have taken the law into her own hands, and have written to Major Merton, telling him all she knew.

The rector of the parish sent daily bulletins to Merton Park, and Mrs. Merton had written a gracious note of thanks informing him it was impossible for her to leave home in her husband's absence, and that she was perfectly satisfied her sister was in good hands.

"A cool person, that," said Dr. Charteris, sarcastically. "Makes the trouble of her sister's illness over to perfect strangers without saying so much as 'by your leave.' I should hate that woman; I always do hate people with outlandish names, and Isola is the worst I've heard."

Meg said nothing. It was another link in the chain of evidence poor Lit's ramblings had given her. If Mrs. Merton were the 'Isola' of her sister's delirium, Miss Charteris was more than content for her to remain away from Charteris Hall.

"Meg," said her brother one morning, about five days after the accident, "I want you to come and talk to Sir Guy. I told you consciousness was gradually returning. Well, today he seems to have thrown off every remnant of his illness, and to be himself again. But when I told him he had been here five

days he seemed overwhelmed; he wanted to set off at once, and asked if Major Merton had not been here to see his sister-in-law. It seems Vernon and Miss Travers were travelling together after all, and I fancy that poor child is right when she says in her ravings they had to rescue our unknown kinswoman from some dire peril. Now, I saw something about the young lady in the *Times* yesterday. I haven't it in my heart to tell Vernon myself, and yet he ought to know, it as it may save him a wildgoose chase and a bitter disappointment. Will you tell him for me?"

"But what is it?"

Neil took up the *Times* and pointed to a short announcement in the first column.

"On the 24th inst., at the parish church, Kennington, Reginald Denzil, late Captain of the 95th regiment, to Helen, only child and heiress of the late Colonel Charles Charteris, and granddaughter of Lord Charteris of Charteris Manor."

Meg read it through, and stared at her brother in blank dismay.

"The very day after the accident then; but for that they would have been in time. Oh, Neil! it can't be that Denzil who grandfather said was a disgrace to the profession of soldier?"

"It is."

"But—"

"He is a scoundrel, the sort of man no sister of mine should even bow to; but her guardians must have been shamefully remiss, for you see she has married him."

"Poor child!"

Meg sighed.

"I don't know that it is surprising. Her mother had a history, you know, and her marriage with my uncle wrecked his life. I suppose her fortune was the attraction."

"And Sir Guy?"

"I can't tell him," said Neil, decisively. "He has never said a word to make me think so, and yet I feel certain he loves Helen Charteris as his own soul, and that his one object was to save her from this scoundrel."

Meg thought she had never seen a more attractive face than the baronet's; he was sitting by the fire in his dressing-room when Neil took her in.

"I think you will like to talk to my sister, Vernon. She can tell you of the inquiries about you much better than I can."

Sir Guy turned to Meg with a smile, and Neil, who had a man's hatred of painful scenes, hastened out of the room.

"Lady Decima knows you are better," began Meg; "she has been suffering from rheumatism, or she would have come to you herself. We have written every day."

"You have been most kind. I know that, under Heaven, your brother has saved my life. I little thought when we were together at Oxford of where our next meeting would be."

"Miss Travers is still delicious, so I think it useless for you to see her."

"Do you mean her people have not removed her—that they have actually left her with perfect strangers?"

"We have been glad to do all we could. She is very much taken with Miss Travers."

"She is a good, honest child—a wonder she is so, considering what her surroundings have been. I know Mrs. Merton is wanting in most womanly qualities, but I did think she had some affection for her own family. The idea of her leaving her sister to struggle between life and death among strangers!"

Meg felt uncomfortable; she knew the secret of the strong man before her, and she must try to hide from him that she knew it. It was a hard task.

"My father thought from the very first there was some anxiety pressing upon Miss Travers's mind. Do you know what it was?"

"I think I do."

Meg went on with more confidence now.

"I believe this dread has retarded her progress. Whenever she speaks at all it is of Nell Charteris and some terrible danger which threatens her. I know one should never attach

importance to the ravings of Delirium, but in this case, the name being our own, I felt strangely interested, and I consulted my father. He says the Miss Charteris spoken of is our first cousin."

"Whom you have disowned?" said Guy, hotly. "Miss Charteris, she is one of the purest, noblest souls you ever knew. If her simplicity is souled, her innocence destroyed, by Mrs. Merton's wiles, it will be the marring of one of the sweetest creatures Heaven ever made."

"I never knew of her existence till the other day, so you must not say that I have disowned her. Indeed, I am only sorry for her."

"She does not need your pity."

"I fear she will need pity all too much, for she has taken her fate into her own hands. The very day after you were brought here she married Reginald Denzil."

In common kindness she kept her eyes on the ground that he might not think her spying on his grief. The pause seemed to Meg of interminable length, the silence almost terrified her; and yet, when Sir Guy spoke, she would have wished it had continued unbroken, for all the fire and animation had died out of his voice. It was full of a dread despair as he uttered three words—"Heaven help her!" Then, before she had realized what was coming, he had fallen senseless at her feet.

#### CHAPTER X.

It was a month altogether before Charteris Hall lost its invalid; then Sir Guy Vernon was well enough to return home to the Grange, and Lit declared she was quite strong, and must make her way back to France, for Merton Park was shut up, the Major had gone abroad on diplomatic business, and his pretty wife was established in a bijou villa in town, looking forward to the delights of the London season, so that Lit's visit to her relations was no longer practicable. She had spent her holidays in being ill, she said, and must now take up work again.

Dr. Charteris told her she was not fit for it; then he sent his wife up to the Hall, and the gentle, motherly woman persuaded Lit to promise to spend two or three weeks at the quaint house in the village which had been a wedding-gift from Lord Charteris to his third son. The Doctor looked at his wife with a half smile when she announced the success of her mission.

"Then you have made up your mind to Miss Travers for a daughter-in-law, Nellie? You know that's what it will end in!"

Mrs. Charteris laughed.

"You are a veritable match-maker!"

"I have eyes, my dear, and I can't help seeing Neil has lost his heart."

"I like her," said the kindly mother. "She has such a sweet face; and I think she has had very little kindness or sunshine in her life. I am not afraid of her making my boy unhappy!"

Dr. Charteris sighed.

"Never go match-making for your children, Nellie. It is what my father did for Charles. But for that he would never have been so bitter about the wife he chose."

"What has become of that poor child?"

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Denzil is in London (he has dropped the 'Captain' now), and living in grand style. I suppose he is counting on the first instalment of his wife's income!"

"Surely if he owes all his wealth to her he must at least treat her tolerably?"

"It is not in his nature to treat anything well that is in his power. I tell you, Nellie, I would rather see one of our girls in her coffin than have to think of her at the mercy of Reginald Denzil."

"I wish you would call on him?"

"Why?"

"It would show him she had someone to care how she was treated; and your father need never hear of it!"

She urged the point so much that the Doctor yielded. He went up to town for the express purpose of seeing how it fared with his brother's child; but the first surprise that awaited him was to find Mr. Denzil in bachelor chambers, and to learn from his servant that Mrs. Denzil was in the country.

The Doctor sent up his card with a request to be favoured with his niece's address. The card came down endorsed with this courteous message: "Mrs. Denzil, having spent her life so far without any relations, has no desire to be troubled by their advances now that she is safe and secure under the protection of her husband."

Dr. Charteris felt surprised. He had fancied a man whose social reputation was as shady as Denzil's would jump at a reconciliation with the family of a noble. He thought a moment, and then drove to the lawyers, who were Helen's co-trustees.

He saw the head of the firm and asked him for Mrs. Denzil's address. The solicitor, who knew him well, waxed confidential.

"That marriage is one of the blackest things I ever heard of. By your poor brother's will the girl could marry any one she pleased after she was eighteen. No one in the world has any power to interfere, and yet I could stake my professional reputation on the assertion that Helen Charteris never married that man of her own free will."

"She did marry him?"

"Sure enough, worse luck. He brought her here not two hours afterwards, with a copy of the certificate in his hand. She signed a power of attorney, so that he could act for her in all things. I tried to ascertain if it was her own wish, and she declared it was. In the face of her statement I was powerless to object, and yet I felt all was not right. I saw something was wrong, and yet I could not put my finger on the flaw."

"He would not dare to be unkind to her."

"He would dare most things, I fancy. I saw strange things for a husband not five weeks married to come to London as a bachelor."

"Where has he left her?"

"I have not the slightest idea."

"But he must give out some statement! Surely inquiries are made sometimes as to her whereabouts; and I suppose he treats all people more civilly than he does me?"

"The account given out is that she caught a very bad cold on her honeymoon, and has spent the rest of the winter in Devonshire."

"That sounds feasible enough, only he ought not to have left her."

"He gives colour to his story by having town every week from Friday to Monday. It is presumed he joins his wife—in Devonshire."

"You don't believe it?"

"I don't."

"Why not?"

"Because one Sunday, when he was said to be in Devonshire, I met him at Richmond, which is rather a different locality."

"What is to be done?"

"Nothing."

"But hang it all, am I to stand by and see that poor girl neglected and ill-treated? She is my own niece, remember, and if she has been brought up a stranger to me it is not my fault!"

"My good friend, remember we have not the slightest proof to go upon. Mrs. Denzil may adore her husband, and enjoy periods of intense domestic happiness when he is within; the Richmond adventure stands on my unsupported testimony. Mr. Denzil gives out he is in London to settle his affairs, and take a house for his wife. Either of those plausible objects may have led him to Richmond."

"I believe you are trying to make excuses for him."

"I am not; I detest the man as much as you do; rather more, I fancy, because I have seen his wife, but I can't help seeing that we have not a tittle of proof against him, and that by trying to prove we had we should do him not the least harm, and probably make that poor child's life all the harder!"



"Well you must see her when the money becomes due!"

"No. Mrs. Denzil having given her husband a sufficient power of attorney; his receipt will be quite sufficient discharge to me for the money paid over. Humanly speaking, I have no more chance of seeing your niece than you have."

"You say she is pretty?"

"She bids fair to become one of the most beautiful women in England."

"Then surely he will be good to her? If she is beautiful he may have loved her face as well as her fortune!"

"He loved another face, unluckily, as is too well known to Dr. Charteris."

The Doctor shuddered.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that; you put all kinds of awful ideas into my head. If it keeps me from seeing my niece, I shall think he murdered her."

"He will never do that."

"Why not? You seem to think him bad enough for anything."

"But that particular wickedness would rob him of his reason for a year. The moment he was free his fortune goes from him. His greatest object ought to be to keep her in safety."

"And you think I can do nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

"If I write to her?"

"He would intercept the letter."

"Well, I haven't done much good in this journey. My wife will say I have failed completely."

"You had better try and adopt the view that Mrs. Denzil is perfectly happy, but her health really requires a warmer climate. If you can persuade yourself of that your mind will be more at ease."

"And you'll keep a watch on Denzil?"

"I'll do my best." The lawyer hesitated, then he added, with most unprofessional feeling in his voice, "You see, Dr. Charteris, I knew the young lady's mother and I always thought your brother Charles happy to win her, in spite of all it cost him for her sake. You may rely upon my doing my utmost for your niece."

It was not encouraging, but the Doctor could do no better. He had to return to Charteris, having very little results to boast of for his visit.

He found Lena at the Rosery, and there was no hiding from her the state of the case.

"I don't think he will be unkind to her," she said, simply, "only he can never care for her. Dr. Charteris, I wonder you are so kind to me. Don't you know it is my sister who has brought all this trouble upon your niece?"

"Your sister is not you."

Lil blushed painfully.

"I wish Isola would go home and live with while the Major is away."

"She is not likely to. My poor child, don't fret about her; she strikes me as a woman very capable to take care of herself."

Lil's eyes were full of tears.

"Mother was always afraid for Isola; she was so pretty, you see, and so much admired."

"Was she like you?"

"Like me! You must be laughing at me, Doctor. Is is as fair as a lily, and I am only a plain little brown thing."

"Everyone does not think so, it seems."

Lil blushed crimson.

"Do you know, Lena, when you go home you will take my boy's heart with you."

"Mr. Charteris will soon forget me."

"He may differently; and I don't think, as a family, we are good at forgetting. He tells me you won't listen to him, and I am sorry for it; any girl might trust her happiness to Neil."

"But I couldn't let him trust his to me. Out Dr. Charteris, think of Isola, and all the harm she has done your niece. How could you let your son marry her sister?"

"I am not afraid. I don't think you and Mrs. Merton can have much resemblance,

Think it over, child, and if Neil persuades you to change your mind, remember we will gladly welcome you as a daughter."

And Neil took Lil for drives in the sweet spring sunshine; he gathered primroses for her in the hedges, and somehow, during these walks and drives, he managed to persuade her he could never be happy without her; and so it came about that the last night of Lil's stay in Gloucestershire found her with a misgiving on her engaged finger, shadowing forth to all the world that she was Neil's promised wife.

Mr. Charteris was to take her home, and make the acquaintance of her parents and the tribe.

"They will say you have done very badly for yourself, Miss Lil," said the doctor, gaily; "your father will find a plain country surgeon a very different son-in-law from Major Merton."

Lil smiled.

"Money doesn't make people happy."

"I don't think you will ever be overburdened with it," said the Doctor. "This house and the position I fill now will be Neil's some day, only you see Charteris Hall has always been a kind of second home to all of us. I expect things will be different when there is a new master there. None of us have seen my brother Tom for twenty years, and his boys are absolute strangers to the old place; but they must reign there, and Neil and Margaret be only occasional visitors. You know all this, don't you, Lil? You have no ambition to be lady of the Hall?"

"Nor lady of the Rosery either," said Lil, quietly. "There is a dear little cottage in the village which Neil means to save up and buy, and we shall make it quite a paradise."

"A paradise of four rooms!" said Neil, comically. "Lit, darling, your ideas of paradise are limited."

"Don't change them," said Mrs. Charteris, kindly. "I like Lil just as she is."

But for all that the Doctor and his wife did feel a little sad sometimes, to think of the day, which could not be far distant now, when the Hall must pass to those who were well-nigh strangers there.

For a dozen years Meg had ruled as her grandfather's housekeeper. All his life Neil had lived almost as a son of the soil, and he would feel it hard to have no longer part or parcel in the fair estate.

"I wish Tom would send his eldest boy home," said the Doctor, musingly, to his wife when they were alone that night. "It's all nonsense his wanting a profession. He'll be Charteris of Charteris, and he ought to know something of his own estate."

"Why don't you write and say so?"

"Tom might resent the interference."

"You can but try."

The Doctor began to think seriously about it. But on the third day after Neil and his fiancée had left for France, an event occurred which made his letter useless. The old master of Charteris Hall died in his sleep as peacefully as a little child, and the Colonel away in Ceylon was the new Lord Charteris.

"You will call at once," said Dr. Charteris to the lawyer. "Tom may have some instruction to send, you know."

"Certainly; but it will be as well to wait till the mail comes in. It's due this morning."

It was brought in even as he spoke, a single letter in a deep black border addressed to Dr. Charteris in a weak, quivering hand.

"From Lady Maude; strange that she should write! She is the worst correspondent of them all."

The letter was short and incoherent. But there could be no doubt of its purport. Colonel Charteris and his two sons had been drowned within sight of their own house through the capsizing of a pleasure-boat. Lady Maude, a childless widow, would be in England by the next steamer after her sorrowful note.

"My good gracious me, Doctor," was the lawyer's first comment, "you're Lord Charteris!"

The Doctor started, and then it all came home to him, the astounding change made by the news from Ceylon. He was the head of his house, Charteris of Charteris.

"No, not Charteris," said Mr. Ashwin, gravely. He was the family lawyer, and had no connection with the firm who had been poor Nell's trustees. "Unluckily the estate and its revenues can descend in the female line; your brother Charles's daughter is now the mistress of Charteris Hall!"

"You can't mean it?"

"Alas! I do."

"Don't think me covetous, or that I grudge my niece her inheritance; and had the news come three months ago, when she was still Helen Charteris, I could have borne it. But to think that such a scoundrel as Rex Denzil should be master in the home of my forefathers, why, Ashwin, it's torture to me."

"I wish with all my heart it were otherwise."

"There must be some mistake, Ashwin. You can't mean that I must see that man ruling at Charteris Hall?"

"I fear so."

"He'll ruin the property!"

"He can't. He—err—his wife—is but a life-tenant; he can't fell a tree, or raise a penny on the place, but it is his wife's for the term of her natural life. It may return to you then if she has no children."

"I suppose I must write to him."

"Better let me send a letter to his lawyers."

"And Ashwin, make a point of seeing his wife. She has given him a power of attorney to act for her, and she has been strictly invisible ever since."

"I'll manage that."

But he had hard work to do. Messrs Cleghorn and Hallis, Helen's trustees, played into his hands, or he never would have succeeded. These legal gentlemen informed Mr. Denzil it was absolutely impossible Charteris Hall and its revenues would be given up to him on behalf of his wife unless that lady came forward and established her right to them.

Denzil was so desperately angry the lawyers trembled for the poor young creature so utterly at his mercy; and he flung out of their office, declaring that his wife was far too ill to be troubled about business matters.

Perhaps Neil was better than he thought her; perhaps her heart yearned towards her kindred; for two days later Doctor Charteris received a short note from her, evidently her own composition.

"DEAR UNCLE CHARTERIS,—

"I hear you are angry with my husband because he did not wish me to come to London. I am not well enough to face the March winds, but perhaps you could come to us here. If you agree to this, and will bring Mr. Ashwin and my cousin Neil as witnesses, I shall be ready to sign any papers, or answer any questions you please. I am sorry to give you so much trouble, but Rex will not hear of my going north at present."

"I am, yours faithfully,

"HELEN DENZIL."

"Well!"

They were holding a council of war—the new Lord Charteris, Neil, and Mr. Ashwin. The new Baron said he meant to keep his title, but he knew how incongruous it was for a country doctor; and, as his father had left him a handsome legacy, he thought he would retire and leave the practice to Neil. Mr. Ashwin urged him to do so; then Neil's letter was read aloud, and carefully examined by the three men in turn.

"I think it is genuine," said the lawyer, slowly. "If it had been written by Mr. Denzil or at his dictation he would have inserted some sentence praising himself for his care of her. I think we may conclude these are your niece's own settlements; and I strongly advise you to agree to her proposal."

"Will you go, Neil?"

Neil shook his head.



["I AM SO VERY GLAD TO SEE YOU," SAID MRS. DENZIL, SHAKING HANDS WITH EACH IN TURN.]

"I can't be spared, father."

"Nonsense, you must come."

"Very well. I can only be away one night, remember; and father, don't leave me alone with Denzil. I don't think I could keep my hands off him."

"We won't say we are coming; it's better to take them by surprise. We'll go down by the night express, breakfast at the hotel, and present ourselves to our unknown relations to-morrow."

"Have we ever seen a photograph of her?" asked Neil, suddenly.

"Not unless Lit showed you one."

"Lit had never seen her."

"There's no difficulty of identity; Messrs. Cleghorn and Harris are quite satisfied that Mr. Denzil's wife is their late ward. I'd rather take them by surprise; we might catch her alone, poor child, and find out whether her husband treats her decently."

It was a brilliant March morning when, after a hearty breakfast, the three men strolled slowly down the Devonshire lanes towards "Primrose Bank," the temporary residence of the Denzils.

Mr. Ashwin, who had all a lawyer's talent for cross-examining, made several inquiries at the principal shops, and learned that Mrs. Denzil had only been a week at Primrose Bank. She was attended by her maid and footman; her husband was daily expected to join her.

Delicate (in reply to Lord Charteris)! Well, some said she had too bright a colour to be healthy, but she never coughed or ailed anything. And the servants at Primrose Bank, who were let with the house, said she was a very nice, pleasant-spoken young lady, and as merry as a cricket.

"We have been wasting our pity," said Neil, and his listeners agreed with him when, ten minutes later, they were ushered into the presence of a slight, black-robed figure whose bright eyes and smiling face both testified to her felicity.

"I am so very glad to see you," said Mrs. Denzil, shaking hands with each in turn. "I only wish Rex was at home; he would understand things so much better than I do."

"I must congratulate you on your marriage, Helen," said Lord Charteris, stiffly. "I trust it has conducted to your happiness?"

"It has, indeed," said the young wife, lightly.

She spoke without the least affectation or effort. Her cheeks were round, and bore the hue of health; in short, a more perfect picture of smiling prosperity it would have been hard to find. Truly, as Neil said, they had been wasting their pity.

But, as after a pleasant half-hour they were retracing their steps to the hotel, the strangest of all thoughts flashed across the young surgeon. His mind had gone back (not unnaturally) to Lit and the many long walks they had had concerning his unknown cousin.

Neil knew what his father did not, that Nell had been wooed by her husband under a borrowed name.

It was this recollection that induced a strange suspicion to flit across the young man's brain. What if this brilliant vision of happy wifehood were but a counterfeit, got up to deceive them? Not one of them had ever seen Helen Charteris—how could they be sure they had seen her now!

No sooner thought than said. Before he knew what he was about, Neil had told his companions the suspicion.

"Your scepticism is remarkable," said Mr. Ashwin, a little coldly, for he considered it tantamount to being accused of too prompt credulity. "I assure you I am perfectly satisfied. What do you suppose Mr. Denzil would do with his real wife, while he dressed up another to represent her? Besides, our visit was impromptu; they could have had no idea we were coming!"

"Neil," said his father, testily, "you must be going out of your senses!"

Would he have thought so could he have

seen a letter then in course of writing, describing him as a "dear old noodle, who just believed everything I liked to tell him; so all is quite safe, Rex, and you are master of Charteris Hall."

Mr. Denzil burnt that letter the instant he received it, and muttered between his teeth that women could never learn caution. There was a mystery in his life, but the Charteris family were not on the track of it yet!

(To be continued.)

**BOHEMIAN FAMILY ART.**—The Bohemians may be said to be naturally glass makers. One of the descendants of the Pretender of 1745, who visited that part of the country in which this manufacture is more particularly cultivated, remarks:—Often a whole family is brought up from childhood in painting and drawing on glass, and thus produces a race of hereditary artists; boys from thirteen and upward are employed in the most delicate works in this art." Of an engraver he says also:—"He lives in a block house. It is composed of two apartments, of which his workshop is one, which is not above ten feet square, with just space enough to hold four little lathes for engraving glass, at one of which he works himself, while the others are occupied by three boys, the youngest, twelve and a half years old, the eldest fifteen. They all engrave beautifully, and with a faithfulness and spirit only to be believed on personal inspection." According to the same authority, the glass workers are familiar with the best specimens of modern and ancient art, which aid in inspiring, by their influence, a desire for excellence. Many of them are naturalists, and thereby gain that minute and familiar acquaintance with natural objects so observable in their works. There is no royal road to excellence, and acknowledging the truth of the maxim, the Bohemian glassworker is content to study hard in order to overcome obstacles to success.





["YOU CANNOT CARE FOR ME AT ALL," BINA RETORTED, "OR YOU WOULD NOT FORCE ME TO AN UNWELCOME MARRIAGE."]

NOVELLETTE.]

## BINA'S SACRIFICE.

—30:—

### CHAPTER I.

Of all the pretty girls in and about Hallington, the prettiest certainly was Bina Tracey. She had an oval face, a pink-and-white skin, a pair of regular Irish blue eyes, heavy-lidded and black-lashed, a rosebud of a mouth, and fair hair that clustered in little soft rings and curls all over her shapely head.

Her figure was tall and lissom, with a slight waist and a rounded bust; and altogether she was the acknowledged belle of the place—an honour which she deserved, and which she bore calmly and coolly—with an equanimity, in fact, that annoyed her rivals, the lesser lights in the firmament, considerably.

Not that she meant to annoy them. Far from it. She was too much *grande dame* for that, though she was but the daughter of a country gentleman—a very wealthy man 'tis true, but one of no particular position.

Still, he had left his widow and only child an income that attracted many suitors to Tracey Place.

They came in shoals, in crowds, like flies round a honey-pot, buzzing and fluttering, and striving one with the other to gain a foremost place in either the still comely widow's affections, or those of her blooming daughter.

For the elder lady was a catch, and well endowed for her lifetime, and the daughter at twenty-one they knew would come into two thousand a-year, and another four on the death of her mother.

What wonder, then, was it that needy half-pay officers, briefless barristers, improvident younger sons, dissipated first-borns, rakish noblemen who had run through a goodly sum, and felt inclined to try the process over again, ill-paid city clerks and a heap of others, fought

and prayed and struggled to win these matrimonial prizes, whose golden guineas would so comfortably smooth those little roughnesses of life, which will occur to those whose pockets are sparsely lined with filthy lucre.

What wonder was it that Miss Tracey and her mother never wanted for an escort to meet, archery party, tennis gathering, or fête—that their programmes were always well filled with the names of the best dancers in and about Hallington! That they were besieged with requests to go to supper, to sing at musical parties, to accept flowers, bon-bons, gloves. All those innocent little trifles that women may accept from their male adorers and friends; that on their 'at home' day they had more gentlemen than lady visitors, and that these said visitors lingered long and late, hoping to get an invitation to dinner, a little encouragement, and then an opportunity to put that momentous question so many of them ardently longed to put, and more ardently longed to hear, a soft "Yes," breathed in their ear in response.

What wonder? Why, none at all when one considers the amount of fun that can be got out of the expending of an income of six thousand a-year.

However, very few of the needy throng, very few of these great, greedy, rapacious, human flies found favour in the eyes of either lady.

They were both clever women, in a bright, witty style; not blue-stockings, speaking Latin and Greek, familiar with Algebra, Euclid, all the ologies, and well versed in political economy &c., but charming, chatty, amusing, full of tact, good sense, and kind feeling, and well aware that their money was more an attraction to their adorers than themselves, notwithstanding their beauty and grace.

Perhaps Colonel Ringwood and Peard Lockhart were the two most favoured, and they certainly deserved the favouritism, for the Colonel, had long secretly admired Mrs. Tracey, and as silently as secretly, for he

was an honest, upright, soldierly fellow, and knew that his sixty years and his grey hair handicapped him heavily in the matrimonial race, and thought she would not care to mate with him, though he was not quite penniless, having over three hundred a year with his half-pay, and some private property; while as to Peard, he could not be classed among the flies, as his father was a rich man—his estate, Lockhart Hall, being adjacent to Tracey Place—and he and Bina had grown up from childhood together, he being her senior by six years, five-and-twenty to her nineteen, and her acknowledged adorer since the time when she wore pantalettes and pink sashes, and he knickerbockers and turn-down collars.

The buzzers feared him a little, his recognised place was at her side. Somehow or other they felt, knew that they must give way to him when he appeared in a ball-room, for was it not he who had taught her to valse so gracefully, to wield a tennis-racket with skill, to be the fearless horsewoman she was, the clever car; and in the old days had not his superior learning, smoothed away the difficulties of her lessons?

Altogether he was a dangerous rival, one who might succeed with the haughty and beautiful girl, as he could not be accused of mercenary motives; and the impetuous crew hated him with a deadly hate, wished him all the ill-luck they could think of, and would gladly have ordered his coffin, and paid for his funeral with their last shillings, if they could only have got rid of him.

Of all his rivals the one who hated him most was Major Vane, Stuart Vane. He was distantly related to the Traceys, and had long loved Bina, almost ever since she wore her first trained dress, and tied up her fair, rebellious locks. He was a man of evil passions, and bad impulses, dissipated, fast, unscrupulous, and had been almost disowned by his family on account of his reputation, and many disreputable escapades. Still, despite all that, he earnestly and passionately loved his cousin,

without one thought to her money either, for he had left out of the ruin of a princely fortune nearly a thousand a year, and expectations from an old uncle.

Notwithstanding this, however, he was regarded with little favour by his relatives, and those who knew him well, and in Mr. Tracey's time, had been absolutely forbidden to call at the Place, or hold any communications with its inhabitants.

The keen old man had seen Stuart's evident admiration for Bina, and not wishing by any means to have the doubtful honour of calling him son-in-law, had put an effectual barrier in the way of his gaining his young daughter's affection, as Vane was a stranger to his kinsman's house, never putting foot across the threshold, knowing well what sort of a reception he would receive.

All this was altered after Reginald Tracey's death. His widow was a well-to-do, yielding woman, and Vane was so very civil at the funeral, to which he was invited for the sake of appearance, made himself so useful, and uttered such a number of appropriately and appropriate speeches, that Mrs. Tracey's heart was won, to a certain extent, and against her better judgment she yielded to his pleadings, finally allowing him to become quite *ami de la maison*, an almost daily visitor, a privilege of which he was not slow to avail himself, and turned to the best advantage.

He haunted Bina's footstep like a shadow, anticipated her slightest wish, made himself useful to her on every possible occasion, and lost no opportunity of aggrandizing himself with his fair cousin.

She received his homage with detailed coolness, refusing his costly presents with cold politeness, and accepting only an occasional bouquet or spray of flowers as a favour and a condescension—a condescension which was duly appreciated by the donor, who felt in the seventh heaven, and on the straight road to ultimate success, when, after several refusals, a spray of Gloire de Dijon, or orchids, were accepted and worn by the lovely Bina.

He did not often feel sure of success, though he had nothing to complain of in general about the way in which the fair sex treated him, for he was a general favourite. Still this one woman whom he longed to win, though not coy, was difficult to woo, for, truth to tell, Miss Tracey was far from partial to the gallant Major.

To her there was something particularly bold and repellent about his large black eyes which were wont to fasten on her face with such audacious pertinacity, and the gaze of which made her feel particularly uncomfortable, though she struggled hard to maintain an outward composure, and never let him guess how much he embarrassed her, or how much she felt like a dove fascinated by a snake, when she met his piercing glance.

He did not know, and perhaps it was as well so, or he might have made unscrupulous use of the unknown power he exercised over her, so mad was his passion for her.

Her mother saw, knew intuitively, what was going on, yet lacked the power to put a stop to it, to forbid him the house, though she was well aware that Vane would never make her child happy, even did she care for him, which she shrewdly guessed Bina did not, and a loveless marriage she could not even think of in connection with her only one.

And so it was in no very pleasant frame of mind that she paced the cosy drawing-room at the Place one chill February afternoon awaiting Major Vane's visit, for she more than guessed he was coming to ask her aid and permission to propose to her daughter.

She gave a half-impatient sigh as she looked out on the wintry landscape—on the trees rimed with frost, the roads and valleys covered with a thick mantle of spotless snow, on the hedges hung with pendant icicles that glittered with rainbow hues, on the beams of the pale sun that, breaking through the dense clouds, illumined the colourless world for a

brief while, and then threw a glance round the warm room, bright with firelight, glowing with soft rich colours, sweet with the scent of winter violets and hardy blooms, that lent their beauty to add a charm to a place replete with every comfort and luxury money could procure, taste desire, and ingenuity conceive.

Everything was beautiful and costly, the statuettes and bronzes masterpieces, the china rare and old, the tapestries lovely beyond compare, the rugs lavishly strewn over the polished floor—spoils from the far West; the Russian steppes, the Indian jungles; the delicately tinted cobweb glass decorating bracket and shelf, Salvati's choicest work; and yet the mistress of all these treasures wore a troubled look, and a frown wrinkled her delicate brow, her lips were tightly pressed together, and her clear blue eyes were full of perplexity.

The look was still there, and did not escape the Major's notice when he was ushered in by the footman, neither did the reasonable and inviting aspect of the room, with its cosy corners, rich appointments, and glow of light and colour, contrasting so pleasantly with the gloomy wilderness outside.

"You look worried?" he observed, after preliminary greetings were over.

"Do I?" she responded, with some embarrassment.

"Yes, very much so. What is the matter?"

"Nothing of much account," she answered, evasively.

"Some business trouble?"

She shook her head, not wishing to tell what actually ailed her; and he, never dreaming that the woman who had welcomed him with so much outward cordiality to her home after her husband's death could possibly object to him as a son-in-law leant forward, and, putting his hand on her arm, said confidentially,—

"Now I tell you what it is, Ada, you and Bina want a man, one closely related to you, to go to and settle all your business matters."

"Do—do—you think so?" she murmured, helplessly, feeling that this was the beginning of the end.

"To be sure I do," he returned, decidedly. "Women never understand how to make the best of business matters, how to tackle lawyers, stockbrokers, and those sort of fellows. I warrant all your affairs are in a regular pickle."

"I hardly think they are as bad as that," she objected, meekly.

"Yes, they are," he retorted, peremptorily. "Why you have some thousands out at one per cent. Haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is that but a pickle, a terrible blender, I should like to know? You ought to be getting at least six for it."

"Not safely, Stuart," she ventured.

"Yes, safely."

"Mr. Clements says not. That nothing over four is safe."

"Clements is an old fool, past his work. If your affairs were managed by a clever fellow you would have five or six hundred a year more."

"I think we have enough."

"Can't have too much of a good thing. Good things, like the angels' visits, are rare."

"They are, indeed," with another sigh. "But matters can't be helped."

"Oh yes they can be helped. The fact of the matter is, Ada, you and Bina ought to marry."

"Oh, Stuart!" throwing up her hands with a nervous gesture of dread at the thought of what was to follow.

"Have you never thought about it?" he demanded, eyeing her keenly.

"Not—not—for myself," she stammered, blushing like a school-girl, which plainly betrayed, that she had done so.

"For your daughter, then?"

"She—is—so young."

"Nineteen. Many girls enter the holy estate long before they have reached that age."

"Not many in England; you are thinking of India, where you have passed a large portion of your time."

"No I am not," he declared, obstinately. "I am thinking of England and of Bina, and with your permission I mean to try and win her for my wife. Have I it?"

He regarded her anxiously as he put this question.

"Yes," she responded, slowly, "you have my permission; but, candidly, I must tell you I think you have very little chance of success."

"Why? Is there some one else in the field; that is some favoured swain?"

"I hardly consider that a fair question."

"Well, perhaps not. Notwithstanding this, however, I should like to try my luck."

"Do so, then," she said, quickly. "Here comes Bina. I will go and leave the place clear for you to propose."

"Thank you. But tell me I have your good wishes for success before you go."

"No, Stuart Vane," she replied, with courage born of desperation. "I cannot tell you a lie, I cannot say I wish you success, for I don't think as a husband you would make my dear child happy."

and turning, she went out through a door leading into the library, thus avoiding a meeting with Bina, who was coming up the drive, and would otherwise have met her in the hall.

## CHAPTER II.

MAJOR VANE stood gnawing the ends of his moustache, and moodily staring at the lithe figure coming swiftly towards the house. His ardour was somewhat damped. What if the daughter viewed him as unfavourably as the mother did? Rather awkward, and he was by no means sure that she did not.

He had more than once seen her eyes flash, and her lips curl, when he had ventured on an extra tender speech, or pressed her hand closely. Still "nothing venture, nothing have," and he very much wanted to "have" Bina and her six thousand a-year. So he went forward to meet her with a suave smile on his moustached lips as she entered the room, and greeted her warmly.

"Where is mother?" she demanded, in rather an imperious fashion. "I thought she was here."

"So she was a short time ago. She went up to her room just before you came in."

"How extraordinary that she should go up now!" and she cast a glance at the dainty tea equipage.

"I see nothing extraordinary in it."

"Indeed! Have you been saying anything to ruffle her?"

"I? Heaven forbid!" he ejaculated, piously. "We are the best of good friends."

"Ah!"

This interjection was not exactly encouraging to an ardent suitor, and he did not find it so; but he was determined not to be baffled, so he moved towards the fireplace where she was standing, balancing one little foot on the fender, and stretching out her pink palms over the cheery blaze.

"You know we are that, Bina," he said, looking at her with dark, passion-filled eyes.

"Yes," she acknowledged, coldly; "you seem to get on very well together."

"Better than you and I do, fair coo."

"Do you think so?" with elaborate carelessness.

"Yes, I do think so, and I should much like all this altered."

"Would you?"

She favoured him with a steady stare for a full moment out of her great blue eyes.

"I should, I think, considering our relationship, and other things, that we ought to be on much better terms than we are."



"What are the 'other things,' pray?"

"The fact—that I love you."

"Major Vane!"

She lifted her head, and straightened her slender neck, with an indescribably haughty movement.

"Well?" he demanded, coolly.

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Not at present, still I have no doubt that I shall be if you continue to treat me as you have hitherto done."

"I—don't understand you," she rejoined, idly.

"No! Then let me lighten your darkness," he exclaimed, hotly; "let me tell you how much you are to me, how ardently I adore you."

"I would much rather you didn't," she interrupted quietly.

But he did not heed her speech; it did not stem the torrent of passionate words that poured from his lips, and she felt secretly afraid of this man, who stood beside her with burning eyes and trembling hands, declaring that she should become his wife, that say what she might then his great love would sooner or later gain its just reward.

"Never," she said, emphatically. "Never; nothing would ever induce me to become your wife, even would mother permit it, which I am sure she would not."

"We need not ask her consent," he rejoined, sharply, stung thereto by the remembrance of her candid declaration that she did not think he would make her daughter happy.

"I should never marry without it."

"Don't be too sure; you may some day."

"It is most unlikely."

"I don't think so. You might marry even me, without her knowledge."

"Ridiculous nonsense. I would never become your wife under any circumstances whatever."

"You—refuse me—then?"

His voice was hoarse and broken.

"I do, most emphatically."

"It is useless; you will be my wife some day."

"Never."

"We shall see. In all my life whatever I have longed for ardently I have become possessed of."

Bina shuddered as he said these words, and she met the glance of his dark, constraining eyes.

What was the power he exercised over her, and what, if his words came true, and in the future, much against her will, she became the wife of this man whom she had always disliked and despised?

"You tremble, you turn white, you acknowledge my power," he exclaimed triumphantly, seizing both her hands in a tight grasp.

"By no means," she returned coldly, recovering herself by a violent effort. "You are impertinent, or you would be if you were in earnest. Of course you jest."

"I am in deadly earnest," he answered, in that measured, masterful tone that filled her heart with such a chill terror.

"Ridiculous; let my hands go," and with a skillful twist she drew them from his grasp.

"Understand. I know why you refuse me," he growled.

"Simply because I do not love you."

"Say rather, because you love another."

"Major Vane!"

Again the dainty head was thrown back with a haughty gesture of affronted pride.

"Yes, I could name the stripling who has won your heart. But mark me, Bina, you shall never be his wife while I live, be certain of that. I would part you from him even at the altar. I have the power to do so, and I will use it without mercy, if you defy me, and seek to become his wife."

"You forget yourself."

And without another word she turned and swept out of the room, leaving the baffled suitor staring moodily at the door which had closed on her retreating form.

Bina felt curiously depressed for days after this stormy interview with her cousin. No name had been mentioned, and yet she knew well that Vane meant Peard Lockhart, and she wondered what was the power he possessed, and of which he boasted so confidently, and felt angry to think he had fathomed her secret, for she did love Peard with all the power and intensity of fresh untried youth, and she did not care that the secret should be Vane's as well.

Her droopy looks attracted her mother's notice, and she urged her to don her velvet and sables, and drive over with her to Trevor House, where the lake was frozen over; and Mrs. Trevor welcomed any of her friends who chose to come and out capers on the ice, providing hot coffee, ginger ale, and other warm, cheering, and innocent beverages for them.

Bina acquiesced, and together mother and daughter drove over in their smart victoria, their arrival creating quite a sensation, at all events among the male portion of the skaters.

It was a brilliant and beautiful scene. Steadily and noiselessly all night the snow-flakes had fallen; the earth was white-robed. Down by the lake the cedar thickets rose one over the other draped in purity, the boughs bent and silvered under their load. Every bush was hung with gem-like icicles, every leaf cased in crystal armour, tree-boles and stones and rails veneered with glass; every blade of grass glistened, every leaf flashed in the sunlight that gleamed over barns, farm-houses, red-peaked roofs and brown-thatched ones, lit them up with a golden radiance, and over all was the deep blue sky, flecked here and there with tiny silver cloudlets.

On the cleanly-swept lake crowds of well-dressed men and gaily-attired girls skimmed along, some hand in hand, some alone, some following one another in the Dutch roll, American fashion, some going through the figures of a quadrille, some attempting to waltz, in a somewhat awkward fashion, to the strains of "See Saw," played by a military band from the neighbouring garrison-town, and all evidently enjoying themselves immensely.

"You are late!"

Young Lockhart had seen Bina, and skating to the bank stood balancing himself cleverly on his skates, and looking up at her, his sunny, grey eyes full of something more than mere pleasure.

"Am I?"

"Of course you are. It is nearly four. Torches will be lighted soon. Shall I put them on?" touching the skates hanging over her arm.

"Thanks!" and dropping into one of the crimson chairs on the bank, she stretched out her tiny brodequins while he adjusted the Acémis, a somewhat difficult task, seeing that he was steel-shod himself.

"There!" as he finished. "Now come along," and giving her his hand they skimmed away side by side, light as a pair of birds, followed by many envious and admiring eyes, for she looked simply lovely in her trim black velvet costume and sables, no ends of ribbons flying out, her delicate cheeks flushed to a bright rose hue, her blue eyes glowing, her lips parted, her whole face and figure instinct with life, youth, and happiness, while he, for manly grace and vigour, surpassed all the other young fellows there.

"A well-matched couple!" said Colonel Ringwood to Mrs. Tracey, as the young people flew off. "Difficult to surpass them in grace and beauty!"

"You are very kind!" murmured the mother, a slight flush suffusing her comely face, which looked as though barely five-and-thirty summers had passed over it, instead of nearly fifty.

"Not at all," responded the Colonel, promptly; "I speak the truth. Your daughter is simply lovely, and Lockhart is a match

for her. I can't say anything more for him than that."

"No."

"I am glad you agree with me. And talking of matches, is it to be one?"

"I hope so!"

"And so do I. He is as good a young fellow as ever stepped, and cannot be accused of fortune-hunting (here the soldier sighed), as he is wealthy."

"No. I should be glad to see her safely married to him!" she rejoined, while a sad look crossed her face as she thought of Stuart Vane and his proposal.

"Still you will feel lonely when she marries!" ventured her companion.

"True; yet I could not consider myself in a matter of this sort," and it was her turn to sigh, and she heaved a deep one.

"Of course not. Still—you may marry again!"

"I—I hardly think so," she stammered; and then raising her eyes and meeting the steady gaze of his she dropped them, blushing furiously; and, somehow or other the Colonel derived an immense amount of satisfaction from that blush.

Meanwhile, the young pair had raced away to a comparatively deserted part of the lake, leaving the gay throng behind.

"Where have you been, and what have you been doing during the last few days?" demanded Peard, pulling up by a dwarf willow, all prickly and sparkling with icicles.

"I have been at Tracey Place, and I have been doing nothing!" she replied, smiling up at him as he stood beside her, still clasping her hands; tall, strong, manly; a lover any woman might be proud of.

"Well, you couldn't do much less, could you?" he laughed gaily; looking down into the blue depths of the upraised orbs.

"I should have some difficulty in doing it."

"And why haven't you come here? The ice has been in famous condition!"

"I—I have not felt inclined to."

"Been out of sorts; a bit off colour?" he queried, tenderly, noticing that now they had stopped their mad careering, she looked paler than usual, decidedly triste.

"Yes, I suppose I have been so," she rejoined; avoiding, however, the glance of his eye.

"All the more reason for your rousing up. You certainly ought to have come here, and not moped at home!"

"How do you know I moped?" she demanded, with a pretty assumption of impertinence—very different from the manner she adopted towards Vane.

"I can see you did!"

"How? why?"

"Your eyes are heavy; your cheeks pale; and altogether, you might sit for a portrait of Niobe!"

"Where are the tears?"

"We can imagine those; and a clever artist could, of course, supply any trifling deficiency of that kind!"

"I don't consider you complimentary."

"Well, Bi!" calling her by the pet name he had used towards her in childhood. "Would't you rather have me truthful than complimentary?"

"Certainly I would!" she acknowledged, giving him a fond look that would have satisfied the most exacting lover.

"That's right!" pressing the little hands he held.

"We must do away with the Niobe-like expression and make you resemble Aurora or Venus, or some other smart, smiling, heathen goddess!"

"Peard, you are getting quite romantic and poetical!"

"Getting? Have I not always been so?"

"Perhaps. Now it is becoming more apparent."

"And you laugh at my sentiment?"

"It seems so ridiculous to hear you talking of goddesses!"

"Does it? How unkind to say that. Do

you know I hoped that nothing I could possibly do would ever appear ridiculous to you?"

"Did you? Well, you see you made a slight mistake."

"So it seems."

And they both laughed, the clear youthful tones ringing out on the frosty air as they forged slowly ahead, still hand in hand.

"You are coming to our dance next month?" he said, as they retraced their steps, and once more joined the gay throng.

"Of course. Do you think anything would induce me to miss it?"

"I hope not. Think what a blighted being I should be if you did!"

"Would you? I think I shall stay away just to see how you look under the blight."

"Bi, you couldn't be so horribly cruel to a poor fellow, whose only crime is loving you too well."

"No, I don't believe I could," she said, softly, looking at him with radiant blue eyes; and the look was seen by one on the bank, who ground his teeth, and swore a wicked oath under his breath.

And that one was Stuart Vane, who, moodily gazing at the skaters, had suddenly caught sight of his cousin and her companion, and noted the interchange of tender glances.

"I'll stop it," he muttered, hoarsely. "I can't stand it any longer. Lockhart is in my power, and now, after all these years I'll crush him as I would a fly—unless—unless she will buy the old man's honour with the price of her hand, and throw over that young jackanapes."

### CHAPTER III.

FEBRUARY merged into March. Nature since autumn had been in a state of hibernation, but now the chill snow had melted, the sun was growing warmer, the fields and hedges were bursting with the promise of May.

In the woods the daffodils that come "before the swallow dares" were showing their yellow bloom.

In favoured spots clumps of primroses peeped from under the greenery. The starlike flower of the stitchwort was out.

The barren clay cuttings were beautified by the dandelion and coltsfoot; the pale pink of the southern almond diffused its delicate colour in shrubbery and garden; while the catkins of alder and birch and willow littered the footpaths, though their leaves had not yet unfolded.

The meadows were a rich green, fair with the first freshness of spring. Away in the trees the birds sang faintly. Ferns here and there sprang up through the grass, blue and yellow butterflies flitted about, and when the sun shone it was like summer.

Delightful weather for a dance at a house like the Lockharts, people said, with the garden, conservatories, and long French windows, and certainly Lockhart Hall looked at its best that warm March night.

It was lighted from garret to basement; all the windows stood open, and the lace draperies swayed to and fro in the gentle breeze. Myriads of coloured lamps hung on the trees and shrubs in the grounds around, while a large crystal globe diffused a more subdued light in the conservatory, leaving far corners quite dim, shadowed with huge palms and tropical plants.

The large, oak-pannelled hall was cleared for dancing, a military band was on a sort of raised place at one end, while flags, and flowers and lace draperies were lavishly used for decorations.

"What do you think of it, Bi?"

Peard asked the question as he stood at her side at the top of the room, which they had to themselves, with the exception of the band, Mrs. Tracey and her daughter having come early, by special invitation.

"I think it simply lovely," she answered, enthusiastically.

"You like the arrangement of the flowers?" he queried, his eyes bent on her beautiful face, just flushed to a bright rose hue, and her brilliant eyes like twin sapphires.

"Yes. That bank of crimson and white roses is most beautiful, and those festoons over the windows! Your designing and arrangement of course, Peard?"

"Why of course, Bi?"

"Because you always show so much taste over the arrangement of flowers."

"Thanks, dear, for the compliment. Yes, settled them."

"I thought so."

"I am glad you are pleased."

"I am more than that."

"And now let us confine ourselves strictly to business for a few minutes."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean," possessing himself of the silver boat that did duty for a programme slung on her fan, "let me score up before the other fellows get a chance."

"Perhaps the 'other fellows' won't want to score up."

"Oh, won't they! Why, Bina, you are more beautiful to-night than the fairest flower in this room!"

"Now, Peard, don't be ridiculous."

"Now, Bina, don't be cruel."

"I shall have to be cruel, if you go on in this fashion."

"I don't think I can promise not to, my own little wife that is to be," he whispered ardently.

"Peard, some one will hear you," she exclaimed, blushing rosy, even her white throat tinged with scarlet.

"Everyone in the place may hear, and welcome. Why should I care?"

"Because I do," she murmured.

"Are you ashamed of my love?" he demanded almost fiercely.

"Ashamed! Oh, no. Proud beyond measure," she said, looking at him tenderly, "only—only—I think—as—as—that—we ought—just at present—to—to—be careful, circumspect," she stammered.

"I see, I understand," he rejoined quickly.

"We are not declared lovers. Well—perhaps you are right. But soon that will be no barrier. I shall see your mother shortly, and then—then, Bina, when I have her consent and yours, we can publish our—"

"Peard," called his father; and without finishing the sentence he had to leave her, and make himself useful among the guests who were gathering quickly and thickly.

Bina was besieged by partners, her programme soon full. Amongst other applicants for the honour of dancing with her was Stuart Vane, looking very handsome and distinguished in evening dress, yet nevertheless evil and dissipated, with a restless glitter in his dark eyes, and a nervous trembling of his lower lip, which he bit every now and then with a fury that brought blood.

"May I have this valse?" he queried, coolly offering his arm.

"No, you cannot," she retorted in a low voice, full of suppressed anger and annoyance.

"The next then?"

"No."

"Which will you give me?"

"I will not give you any."

"You had better, Bina," in threatening tones.

"I think not," she rejoined icily.

"I mean to dance with you to-night."

"You make a mistake. You will not do so."

"Before the evening is over you will dance with me of your own free will, and be glad to do it."

"Nonsense! ridiculous nonsense!" and with a gesture of contempt she wrenched her eyes from the constraining gaze of his, and putting her hand on Peard's arm, who had come up, valsed off with him.

"You shall pay for this," muttered Vane menacingly, and with a black frown on his

brow he went in search of his host, Reternan Lockhart.

Meanwhile Peard led Bina into a dim recess of the conservatory, and drawing a curious old moonstone ring from his finger said, as he placed it on her taper digit, "Wear this, Bi, until I place a plain gold one there instead."

"I will," she said, kissing it tenderly.

"It is an heirloom," he went on, "has been in my family two or three hundred years. Every Lockhart gives it to his promised bride as a betrothal pledge, and a night or two before the day on which the marriage is to take place, when everything is settled, and the lady knows that nothing can keep her from becoming Lockhart's wife, she sends it to her bridegroom. Will you do this?"

"Yes," she murmured, "when I return this to you, there shall be no shadow between us—nothing to keep us apart for many hours."

"Thanks, dearest!" he whispered, brushing her cheek with his moustached lips.

For some time they sat there, and then Peard, remembering he had a duty engagement to fulfil, left her, as she preferred resting in that dim, cool retreat (to being in the noise and glare of the ballroom). She shifted her position, going over to the side near the house.

The glass door leading to the library stood a little way open, and through it floated the hum of two voices speaking in subdued tones.

At first the sense of the conversation did not reach her, but suddenly she heard a voice, which she knew was old Lockhart's, say in agonized tones,—"My child, my poor boy; can you not spare him, Vane?" and her cousin's return, coldly and sternly,—

"No! justice must be done now, even if tardily."

At once all her energies were concentrated on listening to what was said. She forgot that it was dishonourable to listen to a conversation not meant for her ears; she only thought of the man she loved, and of Stuart's threat.

"It has all been mine so long, now!" moaned the old man; "I cannot bear to think of parting with it."

"It is only yours by fraud—a base inhuman fraud!"

"My poor boy!" he said again.

"Your brother's poor girl!" sneered Vane, ironically.

"She has never known what it is to live luxuriously."

"True. She has had to toil and toil, while you and your wife and son luxuriated on what is really her money!"

"Are you sure, Vane?—are you sure?" asked Lockhart, in trembling tones.

"Quite sure!" returned the other decidedly.

"Because we all thought Clarence was never married!"

"Then you thought wrong. I have the certificate of his marriage!" and Bina saw him hold up a slip of paper.

"Let me see it!" cried his companion, stretching out his hand to clutch the precious morsel.

"No, rather not!" returned the Major, with a nasty laugh. "I am not such a fool as to allow you to get this into your possession. Read here, while I hold it, if you want to!" and slowly and painfully Lockhart read the certificate which gave undeniable proof that his elder brother had married, for having gone abroad his family had lost sight of him, and for years had had no tidings whatever of the wanderer.

"It is true!" he murmured, brokenly.

"Quite true! You have no right to Lockhart Hall!"

"My poor boy! his brilliant prospects are ruined!"

"You don't seem to think about the poor girl who has lived in poverty while you and yours fattened on her lawful inheritance!"



"She has never wanted for anything!" said Reternan, quickly; "I have always seen to that!"

"No doubt! To make her comfortable, to give her a pittance was just the right way to keep her quiet."

"And you mean to expose me?"

"Villainy ought always to be exposed!" retorted Stuart.

"I did it for my boy's sake!"

"And I do it for the girl's sake!"

"What is she to you?"

"A woman—a weak creature, who ought to be protected."

"Will nothing tempt you to forego this, Vane?"

"No, nothing! Stay! there is one thing," and he whispered to his host, but the old man shook his head, growing visibly paler the while.

"Very well, then!" said the Major, jauntily; "you refuse my terms. Do so, and tomorrow every one shall know of what metal the honoured master of Lockhart Hall is really made!" and turning, he stepped out into the conservatory, leaving his companion with his face buried in his hands.

For a moment Bina stood motionless, stunned, bewildered by what she had heard; then, recovering herself, she stood forward out from the shadow of the giant palm, and laying her hand on his arm, gazed straight into his face.

"Stuart Vane!"

Her voice was hoarse and strained.

"Ah, *ma belle cousine*," he said, lightly. "Why do you condescend to honour me with your notice?"

"I—I—heard what you said—in—in there."

"Eavesdropping, eh! A nice accomplishment for a haughty, high-bred young dame. Who taught you it, your mother or lover?"

"Neither," she answered, curtly. "Do not let us bandy words. You have a paper there that concerns the Lockharts."

"Yes, well?"

"What—what—is it?"

"A cool question! Still you are a woman, and a lovely one, so you can't be denied," he laughed, looking at her admiringly. "This paper," touching his pocket, "will turn Lockhart out of house and home, make him a penniless wanderer, without a crust to eat or a drop to drink, or a shilling to jingle in his pocket, and it makes his hopeful son and heir a beggar. That is interesting to you, no doubt?"

"Will you sell me that paper?" she asked, disregarding the sneer.

"What will you give for it?" he asked.

"All that I am to get when I come of age," she returned, eagerly and anxiously.

"Not a bad offer, still it won't tempt me to part with this precious little document."

"You want more?"

"I want more."

"How much will you take?"

"Nothing in money; I want something else."

"What do you mean?" There was an uneasy ring in her voice.

"Bina," he said, coming closer, and looking down at her with glowing eyes, "I love you—I asked you to marry me once; you refused me with scorn. I ask you again now. Will you?"

"No."

"Not even for this?" holding up the certificate.

"I could not."

"You might do worse. I adore you; you can give Peard his inheritance, secure it to him. Think, it is not much of a sacrifice for one—you—love."

This last word seemed to stick in the Major's throat.

"I could not. Mother wouldn't permit it."

"As I told you before," he said, grimly, "we need not ask her consent."

"I—I—don't care—for you."

"I know that perfectly well. Still you see

I do care for you, and am willing to marry you, though I know of a certain little tenderness you have for another man. Yet I won't let that stand in the way. My affection for you is too great."

"You cannot care for me at all," she retorted, flushing and paling by turn.

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Your trying to force me into an unwelcome marriage."

"All is fair in love and war," he laughed.

"This is not fair. You have me at a disadvantage."

"It is the only chance see of winning you."

"You—you—would—take an unloving—wife?" she faltered.

"Yes, I would take you under any conditions."

"Will not anything else tempt you to part with that?" pointing at the certificate.

"All the wealth of Midas would not tempt me in competition with this," touching her hand.

"Have you no pity?" she asked, despairingly.

"None where Peard Lockhart is concerned," he replied, coldly.

"You love him!"

"Yes, I do," she said, lifting her drooping head, and looking full at him. "I love him with my whole heart and soul, and shall to the last day of my life."

"You may do that, but you will never be his wife, never lie in his arms, never bear his name. You will be mine—mine. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," she answered, slowly, her eyes fascinated by his, which were fastened on her face in an admiring gaze.

"And you consent?"

There was no answer. Her bosom heaved, her lips parted, but no sound issued from them.

"Think," he continued, "if I make use of my knowledge Peard will be a beggar, a homeless wanderer, branded as the son of a man who is a thief, one of the most aggravated kind. You can save him from this. You can make him rich, honoured. Say, will you make or mar his future? Will you be my wife?"

"I will." Her hand closed over the paper he offered her, her cheeks grew deathly pale, and she would have fallen but for his supporting arm.

For a few moments all was dim confusion before her eyes. Her brain seemed to reel, and she did not recover until after the Major had forced some brandy between her clenched teeth. Then he led her triumphantly to the ballroom, and, despite her pleading, made her dance two valses with him. His victory was complete. Before she left Lockhart Hall that night she had solemnly sworn to become his wife within a month.

#### CHAPTER IV.

THE violets were blooming, the young grasses springing green and verdant, the primroses in full glory when Bina gave her hand to Stuart Vane. It was a private marriage, conducted with the greatest secrecy in a town some fifty miles from Hallington, for she was a ward in Chancery, and the Major by no means wished to jeopardize his precious liberty by having it known that he was marrying a minor without the consent of the Court, and against her mother's wish, for Mrs. Tracey had shown pretty plainly that she would never consent to the marriage.

Thus was his victory shorn of some of its glory, for his pale victim steadily refused to go to the hotel where he had ordered breakfast, and going to the station took the first train back to Hallington. Of course he went with her, and feeling the guard, secured a compartment to themselves.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" he asked, after awhile, glancing at the dainty, averted head.

"Nothing," she answered, without turning towards him.

"You should have."

"Hardly."

"You owe me obedience."

"I owe you nothing," save a life-long misery."

"Bina"

No answer.

"Bina," he repeated, laying his hand on her arm, "Turn and look at me, I command you to."

At this she turned and looked at him, and the anguish in her eyes smote him keenly, for he was not utterly bad.

"Bina," he whispered, drinking in all the pale beauty of her face. "Can you not love me?"

"No."

The answer was short and sharp, and a winced visibly.

"I am your husband," he urged.

"Not of my own choosing, sorely against my will."

"Still you cannot alter matters now."

"Unhappily not."

"Would you if you could?"

"Not if I could save—him—one moment's pain," she said, with fierce energy, blushing to the tips of her ears.

"Nice kind of thing for a bridegroom to hear," he mutters. "Do you know that I can do as I like with you," he demanded, throwing his arm round her, and drawing her to him forcibly.

"Let me go," she cried, struggling vainly to free herself.

"Listen," he said, "you are mine. Of what use is all this folly! I take my right," and he stooped his lips to hers, and took a long passionate kiss. When he lifted his head the look on her face startled him, the girl's face had fled, and in its place was an expression of hardened despair.

For the rest of the journey he did not molest her, and let her go to Tracey Place without a word.

He had not married her for her money, still he thought it would be foolish to throw away a fortune like Bina's, and get himself sent to prison as well, so he meant to keep the marriage secret, until she was of age.

The morning after the wedding he sent her a letter and a bouquet. The letter was a request that she would fix an early day for a meeting, and the answer he received was as follows:—

"I defy you. My mother is ignorant of the tie that exists between us, and while she is so I decline to meet you, or hold any communication with you, except in her presence."

This nonplussed Vane. He felt she had the advantage of him, and was forced to content himself with meeting her in public at the houses of mutual friends. He haunted her like a shadow, went everywhere that she went, and was ever at her side. Not that he derived much satisfaction from this. She was coldly polite when any one was near, defiantly hostile when they chanced for a moment to be alone, which was very seldom, as she never danced with him, nor played tennis, nor rode, nor did anything she could possibly avoid, and Vane began to find that his Hesperian fruit was only dust and ashes after all.

For Bina matters were terribly painful. Day by day she had to fight off a declaration from Peard, who could not understand the change in her, more especially as she continued to wear his ring, which she could not bring herself to part with, as she remembered, only too well, the terms under which it was to be returned, and also because he often found her soft blue eyes fixed on his face, full of intense love and devotion. It was a mystery which he wished to fathom, and which he determined to do on the first opportunity.

The opportunity came at an early tennis party given by Mrs. Trevor. Bina, listless and distrustful, after playing a game or two with

uninteresting strangers, wandered away into the pine wood adjoining. There was no wind; a strong, bright sun poured down making it almost as warm as summer. In the trees was a humming sound from the bees, the birds were singing clear and loud; a willow wren called to his mate in amorous notes from the silent fir-top. Sulphur and blue butterflies, with here and there a scarlet admiral or painted lady, tempted out by the glowing sunshine, swept by on gaudy wing, but she hardly noticed them, her heart was too heavy, and she started nervously when a shadow fell across her path, and Peard Lockhart stood before her.

"Bina!"

"Yes," she answered, tremulously, not looking at him, and turning as white as her gown.

"Why do you avoid me?"

"A—avoid you," she stammered, helplessly. "Do I avoid you?"

"You know you do. You have done so for the last six weeks. Tell me, have I offended you?"

"No, oh! no," she answered, eagerly.

"Then what is it?"

"Why,—it is nothing, Peard. You imagine this—that is all."

"Nonsense, Bina, you know I don't."

"I am sure you do."

"And I am sure I do not. Now—who is right?"

"Why I am, of course," she rejoined, with a touch of her old light hearted vivacity.

"I am not quite certain of that. Anyway, though, I mean to have matters set quite straight between us before we part this evening."

"Do you?"

She tried to speak jestingly, but the words almost died away on her pale lips.

"I do."

His tone was full of determination. She felt there was no escape.

"You don't ask why?" he went on after a pause.

"No!" she returned, in low tones.

"Perhaps you don't care to know," with considerable pique.

"Yes, yes, I do," she assured him, hastily lifting the blue eyes, and meeting the full, tender gaze of his, which discomfited her considerably.

"Well then, it is because I'm going away shortly?"

"Going away!" she echoed, a curious mingled feeling of relief and sorrow overpowering her.

"Yes; I am tired of this pointless, useless existence. More so since you have snubbed me (she winced here and put up a small faultlessly gloved hand in protest), and my father is very anxious, strangely so, to get me out of England (his listener knew only too well why); so I am going to Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and France; and, perhaps, on to the East after!"

"Quite a tour!" she said, faintly.

"Quite," he responded.

"And the eastern portion of the globe is not very safe now, with this Egyptian trouble?" she remarked; looking at him with considerable anxiety.

"I shouldn't mind that; quite on the contrary. The prospect of a little fighting is pleasant to me. I shall certainly volunteer for special service, and have a shot at these rascally Arabs, if I get half a chance."

"Peard; you will not?" she cried, imploringly.

"Yes, my dearest; I will!" he returned, coolly. "Would you mind if an Arab bullet laid me low?"

"Mind!" she whispered, forgetting everything at the mere thought of such a thing.

"Mind! why, I should die too. I should not care to live then."

"That is what I wanted to know!" he said, joyfully; catching both her hands and pressing them tenderly. "You love me?" but

instead of a rosy flush, her face grew deathly pale, and she tried to withdraw her hands.

"You love me?" he repeated, bending towards her.

"Yes, I love you!" she murmured, indistinctly.

"And I shall come back to claim you as my wife!" he cried, triumphantly.

No, Peard," she returned, in hoarse and trembling tones.

"No!" he exclaimed, in utter surprise.

"No. I can never marry you."

"But," he expostulated in bewilderment.

"You have given me to understand a hundred times that you would. You jest; say you jest?"

"No. I am in very sober earnest."

"I will not believe it."

"You must!"

"You do not mean what you say?"

"I do, indeed!"

"You mean that you will not be my wife?"

"Yes."

"You shall tell me why?"

"I cannot."

"Do you care for anyone else? If you do you shall never marry them. Do you know, Bina, that I feel I should kill the man who became your husband?"

She shivered as he spoke, as though a chill wind had blown on her.

"Is there anyone else?" he repeated.

"No. You are more to me than anyone else in the whole world," she cried, passionately; "than anyone ever has been, or will be!"

"And yet—you refuse me?"

"Yes, I refuse you!"

"And you will not tell me why?"

"I—I cannot."

"Bina, are you a flirt? Do you want to break my heart?"

"Oh, no!" in anguished tones. "Believe in me; believe in my devoted love for you!"

"How can I when you treat me like this?"

"It is difficult, I know," she acknowledged.

"Only do." And she looked at him with eyes so full of love that he said,—

"You will change your mind when I come back from abroad."

"Don't hope that, Peard."

"But I shall, I must. I shall come to you at once, and plead once more for the boon of your affection."

"No, Peard, you must not," she said, with sad gravity, while the tears gathered thickly on the dusky lashes. "You must never ask me to be your wife again."

"Bina!"

The despair in that single word went straight to her heart. And she went on,—

"Never, unless I send you this," touching the old ring he had given her. "Should the time ever come when I can marry you I will send you this, or place it on your finger, according to the old tradition."

"Must I be content with this promise?"

"Yes. Until you have this ring from me you must not even think of asking me to be your wife."

"So be it," he answered, quietly, kissing the hand he held. "I will never vex you again—only—hope—and hope from day to day that my ring may come back to me."

"Yes, and pray for me," she cried, "pray for strength and courage for me."

"I will," he returned, and, asking no more questions he led her back to the gay throng of idlers, and stayed by her side for some time, talking commonplace, though all the time his heart was wrung with agony, and he was wondering, dully, what this unseen unknown barrier that had risen up so suddenly between them was.

When he left her place was at once taken by Major Vane, who had been watching them for some time with jealous, disapproving eyes.

Peard Lockhart's attentions to you are far too pronounced," he declared, in an arbitrary manner.

"Indeed!" she responded, coldly, staring straight before her into space.

"Yes. People are talking about it, saying it will be a match between you some day."

"Really!"

Her disdainful tone stung him.

"You must not allow it."

"Oh!"

"He is far too devoted. I will not have you receive his lover-like attentions in this fashion."

"You cannot help it."

"Yes, I can. You are not to dance with him again, nor stroll away into unfrequented places, nor sit in out-of-the-way corners. Do you hear?"

"Yes. I hear."

"And you will obey me?"

"By no means. I shall do exactly as I please in this and all other matters."

"You dare not," he expostulated, wrathfully.

"Oh, yes, I dare," she rejoined, coolly.

"Your mother would not approve if she knew," he urged.

"You think so?" mockingly.

"I am sure of it. She would think it most improper of a married woman to conduct herself as you do."

"Then tell her," she said, with a strong spice of malice.

"No, I shall not."

"Of course, I know you won't. You are afraid of the consequences."

"What consequences?" he demanded, shortly.

"Being imprisoned for marrying a Chancery ward without the sanction of the Court," she retorted drily, for she had been reading up, and inquiring about the matter, and knew she had him at a disadvantage.

"Pooh! rubbish!"

"You would not think it 'rubbish' if you found yourself in Holloway Gaol, with the prospect of remaining there for a year."

"Ridiculous. I am in no danger of that!"

"Not while I hold my peace. But supposing I choose to publish our—marriage?"

"Well?" he asked, defiantly.

"Well, you would find then that you had put yourself within the pale of the law."

"You don't mean to publish it?" he said, some considerable anxiety visible in his tone and manner.

"No, I do not," she acknowledged, "while you keep your distance, and don't attempt to interfere with me."

"You are my wife. You owe me love, devotion, obedience."

"Never, never!" she exclaimed vehemently.

"I will never be more to you than I am now. The mere courtesy I would accord to any stranger will be yours, so long as you do not presume, and keep your distance. Attempt to assert what you term your right, and you lose that; and more, I will do my best to get you punished. Do you understand me now?"

"Yes, I understand," he rejoined, in low tones of suppressed anger and passion.

"Very well, then, I defy you. You are, and must be, as though you were nothing to me," and, rising, she swept away from him with the air of an empress.

## CHAPTER V.

So far, Bina gained the victory, and her husband kept his distance, though for some months he haunted every place where she was likely to be, and followed her like a shadow, until the gossips wagged their heads, and said it was a case, and that Bina would soon follow her mother's example, and take unto herself a husband—for Mrs. Tracey had yielded to the Colonel's pleadings and become Mrs. Ringwood—and that now it was plain it would not be Peard Lockhart, who had evidently declared off. But Major Vane, despite his reputation for gallantries, and his faculty for getting rid of any amount of money, Bina smiled when kind friends retailed this gossip, and went on the even tenor of her way, hiding the grief and



regret that consumed her with infinite fast, appearing to the world as beautiful, fascinating, and brilliant as ever.

Only those who know her very well, like her mother and stepfather, saw that a cloud lay on her, dimming the radiance of her beauty, and checking the flow of youthful spirits, and they did not guess the truth, only thought that Peard's absence was the cause of it.

About a year after her marriage a letter was put into her hands. At a glance she saw it was from her husband.

"Finding that you are obdurate," it ran, "and seeing that you hate me, and never will do otherwise, I have determined, as I love you most truly—though you will not believe it—to give you up, to go away, to release you as far as I am able. The secret is safe with me. I shall never claim you as my wife. From this day consider yourself as free as you can be under the circumstances. Could I undo what is done, believe me, I would. I see now I did you a great wrong, but passion blinded me, and I hoped against hope that some day you would grow to love me. I know that that happiness never can, never will, be mine, and so I leave you. My regiment is ordered to Egypt. May an Arab bullet soon lay me low, and set you free, to give your hand where your heart is already given. Your husband,

"STUART VANE."

It was with conflicting emotions she read this letter. She was glad to be free from a man she despised; and yet how utterly was her life ruined—how impossible, how insurmountable a barrier lay between her and Peard! And then she was a married woman, and yet all the days of her life she must be alone, shutting her heart to human love, companionship, and all those joys a happy marriage brings, and must go down to her grave, to all intents and purposes, an old maid, an unloved, uncared-for creature.

It was inexpressibly bitter. The earth was beautiful. Why could she not be happy like others? It was hard that her life should be smothered and ruined through the blind inordinate passion of a selfish man, and not only hers but Peard's as well, for she knew that after loitering in sunny lands he had gone to the East, and was fighting for England against the swarthy savages of the desert, in deadly danger night and day, and all because of his love for her, his hopeless, rejected love.

"What shall I do, what can I do?" she sighed, pressing her hot forehead against the cool glass of the window. "To live here in this inactivity will kill me, and that not soon, or I could bear it, but by slow, and torturing degrees. If I were only poor, if I had to work hard for my living I might not have time to think, now I shall go mad," and she moaned with anguish.

"If I could only be with him," she went on, "only help him, I might do so much. Here in England I am useless," and then, like a ray of light, it flashed across her that she might go as a nurse to the seat of war, and perhaps help to alleviate the pain of her loved one.

She was a woman of action. Without a moment's hesitation she went to consult her mother.

"Mother," she said, abruptly, "I am going to Egypt as a nurse, to help with the sick and wounded, unless you object to it."

"My dear, is it a fit place for you?" exclaimed Mrs. Ringwood.

"Yes, I shall help the sufferers, and you have often told me that I am a good nurse."

"So you are," she acknowledged candidly; "still, think of the hardships you must encounter, the horrors you would see on every side."

"I should not mind that if I could do good. Hundreds of girls like myself take up nursing nowadays."

"Of course they do," chimed in the Colonel, who knew that hard work was the best cure for Bina's melancholy. "And what can be nobler than for a woman to give up ease and

comfort, and go like a good Samaritan to lighten the pain of those who fight, bleed, and die for their country."

"You are enthusiastic!" said his wife, with a smile.

"I am," he agreed, "in this matter."

"I shall be better out there, mother," urged the girl. "I seem just to be rusting here, mouldering away as it were. I want something to stir my energies."

"Of course you do," asserted the Colonel.

"Are you strong enough?" hesitated Mrs. Ringwood, loth to part with her child, and yet, seeing there was something radically wrong with her, that change and active employment might set right.

"Yes, oh, yes! I am very strong."

"You can't go alone?"

"Certainly not, I shall take Allen with me. She is a sturdy, faithful girl, and will go anywhere, do anything for me, I am sure."

"Well, then, if you will go I suppose I must—"

"Consent, dear mother," she interrupted hurriedly.

"Shall I?"

Mrs. Ringwood's eyes sought her husband's.

"Yes," he replied, with an emphatic nod at her. "It is the best thing for Bina."

"Then, my love, I consent; only I don't know how to part with you, or what I shall do without you."

"You must think of the good work I shall be doing, mother; of the poor, noble fellows whose wounds I shall bind up, whose sick beds I shall tend, and whose last hours I shall try to soften and soothe."

"Yes, yes, my child, I must think of that, not give way to my own selfish sorrow," and mother and daughter embraced fondly.

A month later Bina stood on the deck of a swift-going steamer bound for the East, with her maid beside her. Her eyes were not fixed on the white, fast-receding cliffs of old England, but gazed steadily at the horizon in front as though she would fain have looked through the immensity of space that divided her from her lover, and have seen what he was doing.

Fast as the vessel went it seemed slow to her impatience, and she would restlessly pace the deck, every day still gazing ahead in her eagerness to catch the first glimpse of the land where he was. She did not lose time on reaching Alexandria, and her credentials—for she had been a probationer at one of the best London hospitals for over a year, and only left, greatly to the grief of the sister of her ward and the nurses, who valued the deft, quick, light-handed, clever girl at her true worth, to please her mother, who could not bear to be separated from her—being first-rate, she was sent on with a batch of other nurses, as near the front as they could with safety go.

At first the scenes and sights around sickened her, but after a while she grew used to them, and could look without flinching on a trooper with his jaw shot away, or an officer with his arm almost sabred in two, or on a poor fellow riddled with bullets, and was ready in an instant to help the surgeons, in their efforts to alleviate the sufferer's pain. She was soon noted as one of their best nurses, and valued accordingly; and though she never ceased to search and look for her lost love, she still was busy from morning till night, and sometimes through the night, when there was skirmishing or an attack on the outposts.

After one of these night raids, as she was going from one tent—where she had made all the wounded comfortable—to another, she saw an officer being brought in, for the moon had risen, and it was almost light as day, and as she paused, wondering if she could help this new victim of the Arab's cunning and treachery, she heard him say in low, laboured tones, that were strangely familiar to her. "Doctor, tell me the truth, am I mortally wounded?"

"It is no use deceiving you, Vane," returned the doctor, "you are."

"My husband!" murmured Bina.

"Have I long to live?" he continued, still more faintly.

"Not half-an-hour," returned the other reluctantly.

"Then, when I am gone, send this packet and note to the lady whose name is on it. Promise faithfully to do this?"

"There is no need," cried his wife, falling on her knees beside him, "I am here."

For a moment the glazing eyes look up into hers without recognition, the cap and dress altered her appearance so greatly; then he murmured,—

"Bina!"

"Yes, it is I."

"And—and—you—forgive me?"

"Willingly, fully."

"I did—you—a cruel—wrong," he whispered, hoarsely.

"Don't speak of it," she implored, holding a cup to his lips. "Take this."

"It is—useless. My minutes—are—numbered."

"Don't speak," she urged, raising his head on her arm as the blood gushed out from his wounded breast.

"I—must—time—short. Wife," with an effort to lift himself, "one—kiss—of your—own—accord?"

She bent her lips to his, holding him close in her arms.

And so he died; his head on her breast, his lips kissed by hers. His relaxing arms told the story, and gently she laid him down, and gave the necessary directions to some of his men concerning the removal of his body to the capital.

She felt a great sorrow for him, but had not much time to grieve. Her hands were full, so many requiring her attention that it left her little leisure. Directly the war was over she went up to Alexandria, where the hospital was still full, and nurses greatly needed. Daily she went through the wards, soothing the sick and dying with her gentle touch, her kind words, and ever looking for the one face her eyes yearned to see.

One morning she came into the ward, pacing slowly down between the rows of little beds, with their ghastly, pale-faced occupants, when suddenly she was startled by a loud shriek, and, turning, saw a man struggling violently with one of the orderlies, and apparently trying to get to her.

In a moment she was at his side.

"Peard!"

She laid her hand caressingly on his head—his struggles ceased as if by magic.

"I knew you would come at last," he said, looking up at her. "Only you have been such a long, long time."

And then he relapsed into delirium, and for days and nights she never left him, fighting death inch by inch for possession of him, and at last she was victorious. Peard was sane and out of danger, only very, very weak. She took him from the hospital to some cheerful rooms, and continued her ministrations.

"Bi," he said one day, when he was better, catching her hand as she handed him something, "tell me, what was it parted us?"

And she told him the whole story quietly and gently, reserving nothing, for she had examined the packet Major Vane had left, and found that the girl supposed to be Peard's cousin and the rightful owner of Lockhart Hall was an illegitimate child of his uncle, Mr. Lockhart's wife never having had a family. Vane had known this, but had kept the secret, knowing that, by doing so, he could force Bina into a marriage with him.

"My noble darling!" cried Peard, when she had finished, drawing her into his arms. "You sacrificed yourself for me."

"Yes, Peard, for you."

"How can I thank you?—How can I show you what I feel?"

"Don't try, please," she said, simply, hiding a blushing face on his shoulder.

"But I must. And now tell me," putting his hand under her chin, and turning up her face so that he could look into the beautiful

blue eyes, "is there anything to keep us apart now—anything between us?"

"Nothing," she answered, softly, drawing the moonstone-ring from her finger and placing it on his.

"My beloved, mine at last!" he cried, rapturously, kissing the lips that were now his own.

They were married a few weeks later, and sailed for England at once, and there were great rejoicings at Tracey Place and Lockhart Hall on their arrival as man and wife, after all they had suffered and gone through.

In the years to come, there was the patter of little feet at the Hall, and the ring of childish voices. And Bina, in the joy of her love and motherhood, forgot those dark days when she had sacrificed herself for her children's father.

[THE END.]

## DEARLY BOUGHT.

—O—

SOME years ago every one on the diamond fields had heard of Mr. Foster's parcel of diamonds. Buyers, brokers, and diggers were constantly talking of that wonderful collection of gems. No one had ever seen it, and some persons refused to believe in it. Foster would not be such a fool, they said, as to keep a lot of money locked up in diamonds. But those who knew most about Foster believed in his diamonds; in fact, some men knew of stones which he had added to his collection. In this case rumour had exaggerated wonderfully little; for, as a matter of fact, Mr. Foster's parcel existed, and was little less valuable than it was reported to be. For some years the price of diamonds had been low, and Foster had determined to hold; but he did not keep ordinary stuff, only picked stones of extraordinary quality.

Whenever he bought a parcel he would select any perfect stone there might be in it, and ship the rest. It was his opinion that diamonds would go up, and that he would realize a great profit when he brought his wonderful parcel home. In the mean time he could afford to be out of his money; for he was a fairly prosperous man, as he had some claims in the mine that brought him in a good deal, and had done very well diamond buying and digging.

Though Mr. Foster was a very good man of business, he was in his private life by no means free from little weaknesses, and they were not all of them amiable ones. It was harmless, if not commendable, for him to be very careful of his get-up and appearance, and to dress with as much care on the South African diamond-fields as he would have done in London.

No one would have any right to blame him for dyeing his twisted moustache black, and making a very game struggle against the ravages of time; nor did he hurt any one by his habit of continually bragging and boasting of the position he held and the people he knew "at home," for this is a weakness common to many worthy and respectable dwellers in the distant parts of the world. But he had one failing which was rather mischievous; although he was by no means a young man—for he was nearer fifty than forty—he was as vain as a girl, or rather as a vain man, and he was convinced that he was so attractive and fascinating that the other sex found him irresistible. He loved to pose in the character of a Don Juan, and though his past successes were his favourite topic of conversation, he took care to let it be known that, if he cared, he could continue these little histories up to the present time.

It was his custom every year to vary the monotony of diamond-field life by occasionally paying visits to the coast; and, from the hints and suggestions he would make when he came back, it would seem that when on

his travels he was always on the watch for an opportunity to get up the flirtations he gloried in carrying on.

It was on one of those trips that he became acquainted with Colonel and Mrs. Ferguson. Colonel Ferguson was supposed to have lately sold out of the army, and, from what he said, he seemed to be possessed of a nice little capital, which he hoped to double in some fortunate venture. He didn't care what he went in for—farming, diamond-mining, gold-digging. He didn't care much what it was, so long as it paid: he said soldiering was a bad game for a married man, and he intended to double his capital before he went home.

Mr. Foster did not at first take very kindly to the Colonel, who seemed a dullish, heavy sort of man, and cared to talk about very little besides betting and racing. But Mrs. Ferguson quite made up for any defects in her husband. She was an extremely pretty young woman, so young-looking that she might have been hardly out of her teens, with a half-mischievous, half-demure manner, which our friend found very fascinating; and it is needless to say that he came to the conclusion that she had fallen in love with him; for it was his idiosyncrasy to believe that he was irresistible with all women. Certainly she was a woman whom any man might fall in love with—a brown-haired, blue-eyed little thing, with a delightfully neat little figure, and always becomingly dressed.

"By Jove, she's a very nice little woman. I must persuade them to come up to Kimberley. Ferguson would do well there, though he's a stupid out of a fellow," said Mr. Foster to himself, as he gave his moustache a twist, looking at himself in the glass, and putting on a Mephistophelean grin, on which he prided himself.

Accordingly, he suggested it to Ferguson that he had better make his home on the diamond fields, as it was the best place for a man of energy and capital. Colonel Ferguson at once fell into the trap which this artful schemer had laid for him.

"Dare say it was as good a place to go to as any other," said he. It seemed to him it was a horrible country: while Mrs. Ferguson was so enthusiastic in persuading her husband, and so anxious to go to the fields, that Mr. Foster put the most flattering inference on her support.

So it came about that Colonel and Mrs. Ferguson were Mr. Foster's fellow passengers from Capetown to the diamond fields, and, more or less, under his auspices, settled among the queer community who toil for wealth in that land of dust and diamonds.

They took one of those little iron houses in one of the principal streets in Kimberley, in which at that time the most prosperous citizens sheltered in the summer and shivered in the winter.

From their first arrival we all took a good deal of interest in the Fergusons. It was never Mr. Foster's habit to be over careful not to compromise the ladies he admired; and there was at once a good deal of talk about Mrs. Ferguson, and a good many stories told about her. Colonel Ferguson became a very interesting person when the fact that he was possessed of some little capital, which he wished to invest, was well known, and a good many plans were made for his safely investing it. There was little Mo Abrahams, who came up to him and told him how a few thousands would turn the Victory Mine, lately known as Fool's Rush, into one of the grandest mining properties in the world: and the Colonel seemed to be much struck with the advantages of the speculation, and thanked Mo for giving him such a chance: but he did not settle to go in for it at once, though he freely admitted that, in Mo's words, nothing could be fairer between man and man than the terms suggested.

"We must have another talk over it," he said, and Mo went off rejoicing.

After Mo went away, Bill Bowker, that fine specimen of the rugged honest digger and

pioneer of the fields, came up to the Colonel, and with much bad language, which it was his rugged honest custom to use, asked him what the little Jew wanted.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but he is going to let you in with that swindling mine of his. The place was salted before they washed up, and I know where they first got the diamonds they found there. I don't like to see a gentleman like you let in. Now, what you want to go in for is digging in a established mine, not for a wild-cat speculation," and the rugged honest one went on to urge upon the Colonel the advantage of investing his money in some claims that were in that portion of the Du Toits Pan Mine, which had somehow gained the name of the graveyard, on account of so many persons having buried their fortunes there.

Colonel Ferguson was very much obliged to his kind friend, though he said that he refused to believe that Mo was not a square man; "over sanguine, perhaps, but means well," he said; "still, I think that what you mention would just suit me. We must have another talk about it."

Thus the Colonel for some time did not settle how he would embark his fortune, but treated with everyone who came to him, almost always entertaining the highest opinion of the suggestions made to him. In the meantime the owners of valuable mining properties were constant in paying him the greatest attention, and he was asked to share so many small bottles of champagne that the barkeepers looked upon him as a perfect godsend, and dated the revival of prosperity on the fields to his arrival.

As the Colonel had a good deal of spare time on his hands, he was able to indulge in some of the pastimes in which he excelled. After some little time he was recognized as a very fine billiard player. At first there were one or two young men who thought they could beat him, and it was a costly mistake for them; but the Colonel explained he was only just getting back his form, and so accounted for the great improvement which could be noticed in his play, after he had got a little money on. At cards he was very lucky; a fortunate whist player, a good "draw" player, while he had wonderfully good luck, when several times he was persuaded, protesting that it was not at all in his line, to sit down to a game of nap.

However, though his card and billiard playing did not lighten his purse, they compelled him to neglect his wife more than was wise, perhaps. Night after night, while Ferguson was at the club, the dangerous Mr. Foster would be sitting smoking cigarettes in Nellie Ferguson's little sitting-room.

Though people did talk a good deal, there was not much harm in it; and Nellie Ferguson, though she did look so young, was pretty well able to take care of herself. Still, she became far more confidential with her friend Mr. Foster than it was wise for a young woman to be with such a very fascinating man. Certainly, when she told him all her grievances against her husband—how he neglected her, and was always at billiards or cards, leaving her all by herself, how he drank too much, and was generally rather a disappointment—she was taking a course which seemed rather indiscreet. But it was not only about her own affairs she would talk; she took the greatest interest in all he had to say about himself, and would listen to his stories of society with never-failing interest. She would encourage him to read poetry to her, for, though his education had been rather commercial than classical, he fancied that he could read well.

"Ah," she would say, "how nice it is to be fond of poetry and art! Now, Tom cares for nothing but billiards, cards, sport, and drink; not even for me, I am afraid." Then she would change the conversation, and talk about Foster's affairs. "Was it true," she would ask, "that he had such a splendid collection of diamonds? She was so fond of seeing them. Couldn't he show them to her?"

Foster made rather a favour of this, for he



said that no one had ever seen his diamonds; still, of course, he would show them to Mrs. Ferguson, only she must come down to the office to see them. Mrs. Ferguson didn't altogether like that; she would sooner he brought the diamonds up to the house. However, she said she was determined to see them, and she would constantly return to this subject.

On one occasion, when Mr. Foster called, he found Ferguson at home instead of at the club, and so he did the next time after that; and, rather to his annoyance, he found the colonel had taken to stop at home. He used usually to sit in the porch, smoking, paying very little heed to his wife or her friend. Still, Mr. Foster found him a good deal in the way, and began to look upon his presence in his own house as little less than an intrusion.

"Do you know that Tom is fearfully jealous of you?" said pretty Mrs. Ferguson to him one evening. "Someone has said something to him, and since then he has never left me out of his sight."

"That's very stupid of him!" said Mr. Foster.

"Yes, it's very silly," said she; "but I'm afraid you're a dreadful man! Anyway, Jack thinks you are, for he has taken to stop at home all day looking after me."

"When is he going to get something to do? If he had more work and less drink, he wouldn't take fancies into his head."

"I don't know," she answered. "I'm afraid he will go away to some other place. Won't that be wretched?" she said.

"Wretched, my dear! of course it will," said Mr. Foster; and he would have said a good deal more only the smoke of his cigarette made Nellie choke; and then her husband came into the room, scowled at his guest, helped himself to some whisky, and left it again.

"By the by," said Nellie, when he had gone, "I've never seen those diamonds; now, you know, you promised I should."

"You must come to the office and see them," he said. "I don't like to bring them up here, unless he's out, for I don't like anyone to see them but you."

"Yes, I know that it's a great privilege for me to see them, though I don't know what harm it can do for a poor little woman like me to see diamonds she can't hope ever to have; you must bring them up here, and show them to me when he's out of the room."

"No, I can't do that; he's always in and out. You must come to the office."

"You wretch!" she said, "you want me to go to your office by myself, but I won't; it wouldn't do at all. Besides, do you know, he never lets me out of his sight for a minute; he hardly ever sleeps for long, and he gets so fearfully violent—I think it's the whisky he takes. Do you know, the other day I thought he would strike me."

Mr. Foster was a good deal impressed with this information, and he looked with no little awe at the culprit, who fidgetted in and out of the room with no particular object. Though he despised the man, he felt a good deal afraid of him.

"By Jove!" he thought to himself, "suppose he took a fancy to go for me—the brute looks pretty strong!"

"If I were you," he said, "I'd give him a strong sleeping draught; he is a misery to himself and everyone else like this."

"I only wish I could," she said; "he gets more nervous and cross every evening, but he won't take anything."

"Well, I'd make him; I'd put a dose into his whisky-and-water, which would send him off fast enough. I'd tell you what to give."

For one minute Nellie seemed to be thinking the matter over. Then she answered,—

"Oh, I wish you would—I'd do it to-morrow; and then you could bring up the diamonds to show me, and we should be alone. Now, write down the stuff I am to get."

Mr. Foster knew a little about doctoring,

so he wrote out the quantities of a drug on a leaf of his note-book, and gave it to her.

"Now promise to bring up the diamonds to-morrow, and we will look at them when we are alone and he is asleep."

"All right," he said; "but I don't think they will interest you, and I hardly like bringing them out; but I can't refuse you anything, my dear."

Just then Colonel Ferguson came in again, and, as he seemed inclined to stay, Mr. Foster took leave of his host and hostess, the latter giving him a look which seem to say:

"Don't forget."

"By Jove! she is a plucky little woman, and dead gone on me! Why, I believe, if I told her to, she'd put a drop of prussic acid in his whisky!" said Mr. Foster to himself, as he swaggered down to the club from Ferguson's house.

That evening he was in very great spirits, and his anecdotes and epigrams were wonderfully brilliant. Everyone understood the point of what he said, and knew to whom his hints referred; and his toadies told him that he was "a bad lot, a very bad lot," for they knew that this sort of reproach was the most grateful flattery to him.

"What an insufferable cad that little brute is! I hope he comes to grief soon," was the remark of one man who probably didn't like him.

The next evening Mr. Foster opened his safe, and took out his parcel of diamonds. After all there was no danger in taking them as far as the Fergusons' house, though they were so valuable, for the Fergusons lived in one of the principal streets in the town. It was rather a silly whim of the little woman, he thought, her being so set on seeing the diamonds; but he knew enough of the sex to know that she was determined to have it granted.

The diamonds were in a large snuff-box. There were about a hundred diamonds, weighing from ten to fifty carats each, and they were worth about £20,000.

Something seemed to prompt him to put the diamonds back into the safe; but on the diamond-fields men get used to carrying about stones of great value; and then he thought of Nellie Ferguson's bewitching little face, so he put the diamonds in his pocket, and started off for her house.

The house stood in what was called a garden, though very little grew there. On either side it was only a few yards from the house next door. As Mr. Foster walked up to the door, Nellie Ferguson came out to meet him.

"Hush," she said, holding her hand up to her mouth; "he is asleep. I've given it him; I put it into the whisky-bottle, and he took it all."

She beckoned him to follow, and they both went indoors into the sitting-room. From the next room they could hear the heavy breathing of the colonel.

"Now, have you brought them?" she said.

"Yes, I've done what you told me to do," he answered. "Let me show you them."

"Stop," she said, "first let me see if he is fast asleep."

She went into the next room, and came back again.

"He's fast asleep, poor old boy," she said.

Foster thought that he had never seen her look so pretty. She was dressed very prettily; had a very brilliant colour in her cheeks, which became her; and her eyes glittered with excitement.

They sat down, and he poured the diamonds out of the box on to a sheet of white paper, which looked gray contrasted with some of them.

"And these diamonds are worth twenty thousand pounds! How good to bring them!"

Foster thought that he never had seen such a pretty little face as hers was, as she looked at the diamonds with a longing glance; but he was rather surprised when she looked up into his face and said:

"Give them to me!"

Of course, he had no intention of doing any such thing; the idea was simply absurd, considering their value. And Foster didn't half like this eccentricity of his pretty little friend; still she looked so pretty, that Foster could not feel angry with her. Her face was close to his—she was looking up at him; he stooped down and kissed her.

Just then he heard a step behind him, and as he turned round his head struck against something hard; it was the muzzle of a revolver, which Ferguson was holding.

Ferguson was wide awake, and there was a very ugly grin of triumph in his face.

"Well, you're a nice man, you are, to drop in friendly of an evening! Hush! don't speak out loud, or I'll blow your brains out at once," said the colonel.

Nellie Ferguson didn't seem to be a bit disconcerted. She had snatched up the diamonds, and she was turning them over, watching their sheen with evident pleasure. Mr. Foster, however, felt anything but at his ease. The situation was a very strange one, for if he shouted out "Murder!" he would be heard by his neighbours on both sides, who were only separated from him by a few feet of open space, and a few inches of wall. One of them was a young diamond buyer, with a taste for comic singing, who had just returned from a trip, home, and was entertaining his friends. And, as he stood, shivering with fear, with the revolver held up to his head, Foster could hear the chorus of one of the songs of the day. He had never cared less about comic singing. But though help was so near, he felt completely in the power of Ferguson, who looked very resolute and reckless, and seemed to be quite in earnest.

Personal courage, never was Mr. Foster's strong point, and now for a minute, he felt too startled to think; in fact, he only had sufficient sense left, to make him restrain his inclination to shout out for help. After a second or two he began to feel more assured. It seemed so unlikely that he should be murdered in the middle of the town, within calling distance of several men; only the revolver was real enough. When a man is holding a revolver up to your head you have the worst of the position. He may not care to shoot; but, on the other hand, he may; and, whatever the ultimate consequences may be to him, the immediate consequences to you are sure.

In a half-hearted way for one second Foster thought of resisting, and he made a movement with his hand towards his pocket.

"Keep your hands up; you'd better," said the other.

Foster obeyed him, and sat holding his hands above his head, looking very ridiculous.

"You'd better take that from him, Nell," said Ferguson.

And Nellie Ferguson put her hand into her dear friend's pocket and deftly eased him of his revolver. A gleam of hope came into Mr. Foster's heart. After all, he thought, people don't commit homicide without reason; and he saw that he had not to deal with an outraged husband, but with a pair of sharpers.

He certainly began to wish that his diamonds were in his safe at home; but he knew they were difficult property to deal with, and hoped to get off without making any great sacrifice.

"What the deuce do you mean by this, Colonel Ferguson?" he said, trying to put on an air of unconcern he didn't feel. "Surely, it's a poor joke to steal into your own drawing-room, and hold a revolver up to the head of a man you find calling on your wife."

"I don't set up for being a good joker," said the Colonel; "but my jokes are eminently practical, as you'd learn if the police of London, New York, 'Frisco told you what they know of Tom Ferguson."

"Well, you'd better say what you hope to make out of this," said Mr. Foster.

"I intend," said the Colonel, "to make a

job for the coroner of you, and take those diamonds for myself."

"Don't talk nonsense, man, you won't frighten me; I'm not so easily fooled. Why, if I don't turn up, a dozen men will know where to look for me; besides that, they will hear you shoot next door. Why, if you shoot, you'd be hung."

"You've no need to bother your head about me, I can play this hand without your advice," said the Colonel. "See here, first I shoot you; then Nell puts the diamonds away; then I give myself up to the police; Nell confesses; I take my trial like a man, and show that I shot you because I found you here in company with my wife, after you'd got her to drug my liquor. See here, the whisky bottle in the next room is drugged. Nell has got the paper you wrote out. The chemist she got the stuff from can be found, and you've taken care to let everyone know what your game is. What do you think a jury would do to me? You'd have to look a long time before you'd get one who would find me guilty of murder. Hang? Why, I shall be looked upon as the vindicator of the sanctity of domestic life. They'd get up a testimonial for me."

Then Mrs. Foster realized the terrible position in which he was placed. The man seemed to be in earnest, and there was a determined look in his cruel, hard face, which made Foster believe that he dared to do what he said; and if he did, it was true that he would be in very little danger of being punished.

Foster could remember a somewhat similar case, in which a jury had endorsed the popular verdict of "Served him right," by finding a prisoner, who had killed the man who had wronged him, not guilty.

He could hear the words of the song which were being sung next door, and he knew that if he shouted out murder he could summon help, but he dared not shout out. Help was near, but the revolver was nearer.

"Stop," he said, catching at a last straw; "you don't know that someone can't prove I had the diamonds with me."

"I'll chance that," said Ferguson. "You see, no one has ever seen the diamonds but us."

As Ferguson said this Nellie left the room with the diamonds in her hand, and then came back again without them. Foster felt that he had seen the last of the stones, which were likely to cost him so dear.

"Spare me; for heaven's sake, spare me. What have I done that you should kill me? Keep the diamonds, and let me go."

"That won't do. I am afraid," said Ferguson; "you might change your mind, and try to get the diamonds back. Of course, I don't want to shoot you, but it's the way to play my game."

Then Mrs. Ferguson, who had come back into the room, spoke for the first time.

"What's the good of all this talk, Jack? Make haste and get it all over."

Just then, in his extremity, an idea came into Foster's mind, and again he began to hope.

"Stop," he said. "Why kill me? I have money in the bank. Spare me, and I will write a cheque for two thousand."

"It's risky for me," said Colonel Ferguson. "Still, a little ready comes in handy. I will take five thousand."

With a very shaky hand Foster wrote out the cheque for the amount asked for, the Colonel still holding the revolver up to his head. Foster handed over the cheque.

"Now I can go, I suppose," he said, making for the door.

"Not yet," said the other. "Get the paper, Nell. Now write out a note to me, inclosing the cheque for a card debt," he added, as his wife took down some paper, and placed it before their guest.

Foster wrote the letter he required.

"That will do. Now write to Nell, sending her the diamonds."

"What am I to say?" said Foster.

"What are you to say? Why, you don't want me to write a love-letter to my own wife

—it's more in your line than mine; but make it pretty sweet, for I don't know but that the old plan isn't best, after all."

Foster had written love-letters before, but never under similar circumstances, with the husband witnessing the performance with a loaded revolver in his hand, nor had he ever made such a very extensive present.

It was some time before he could pull himself together sufficiently to write, and one or two attempts were condemned by his severe critic, who said,—

"No; that sort of trash isn't good enough. Put a little more sugar in it. Why, hang it, man, I thought you were so good at it."

At last the right sort of note was written.

"That will do. Here, what do you think of it, Nell," said the Colonel, passing the note across to his partner.

"Why, I think it a dear little note; it's a beautiful note; the prettiest note I ever got. What a darling man you are to give me such a present; and yet what a wicked wretch you are to write like that to me," and Mrs. Ferguson looked at her correspondent, who was regarding her with no very loving glance, and then burst into a peal of silvery laughter.

The Colonel seemed to take up the joke.

"Why, hang it, man," he said, "but you're a generous, big-hearted fellow. There are some men who wouldn't care about their wives taking presents from such a gay fellow as you, but I know you mean no harm, old fellow," and the Colonel gave him a slap on the back which made him start with terror. "No," he continued, as his visitor made a motion as if he were going, "you shan't go yet. Stop and drink—stop and drink," he repeated, with a warning gesture in his face.

Mr. Foster sat down at this pressing invitation, and took one or two glasses of brandy and water. He felt that his nerve was altogether gone, and that he was obliged to obey the other.

At last Ferguson let him go, and opening the door for him, took a noisy leave of him, that the neighbours must have heard; and then he lurched home in such a state of brandy and shock that he could hardly realize his loss before he tumbled into bed.

The next morning he did not wake up until it was late—past ten o'clock—and then he by degrees remembered the events of the night before.

"Was it a dream?" he thought; and he went to his safe and found out that it was no dream—the diamonds were not there.

What could he do to get his diamonds back was his first thought. He could think of nothing, for he remembered the letters he had written, and already it was too late to stop the cheque, for he knew it would have been presented as soon as the bank opened. Then he began to think that the best thing he could do would be to keep his sorrows to himself, for no one would believe his story; and the people who lived next door to the Fergusons would have heard Colonel Ferguson let him out of his house, and would never believe that anything of the sort had happened to him that evening.

So Mr. Foster did nothing, and he was not surprised that evening to hear that among the passengers by the coach to Capetown were his friends, the Fergusons.

He never saw them again, nor did he wish to. They were last seen, some time ago, in Paris. Ferguson was the same stolid, heavy-dragon looking man, and Nellie Ferguson was as young and charming-looking as ever; and they seemed to be very prosperous, so they probably did well with Foster's diamonds.

T. W.

JUDON no one by his relations, whatever criticisms you pass upon his companions. Relations, like features, are thrust upon us; companions, like clothes, are more or less of our own selection.

## FACETIE.

EMPLOYER: "Don't you see what's on the door?" Pat: "A bit of paper, sir." Employer: "It says, 'Please shut the door.' Pat: "Faith, I didn't hear it, sur."

CUSTOMER in restaurant: "Waiter, this chicken soup has feathers in it." Waiter: "Yes, sar. If yo' want soup made outer chickens dat am old 'nough to be held, sar, you'll have to go to some odder establishment."

A PARTY of gentlemen were talking about courting, and one of them said he would never risk that kind of thing again. "Why so?" was the general exclamation. "Because," he answered, "I once courted investigation and it ruined me."

NIOW young man (lecturing to a Sunday-school): "Now is there any little boy or little girl who would like to ask any questions? Well, little boy, I see your hand: you needn't snap your fingers. What questions would you like to ask?"—Small boy: "How much longer is this jawin' goin' to last?"

TEACHER: "What are the names of the several days of the week?" Boy: "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday." Teacher: "That's only six days. You have missed one. When does your mother go to church?" Boy: "When pa buys her a new hat."

A CERTAIN judge having been called upon at a public meeting for a song, replied that it was not in his power to gratify the company. A wag who was present observed he was much surprised at the refusal, as it was notorious that numbers had been transported by his voice.

DR. WAAGS (inquiring into the family history): "Humph! Now, Sir, will you tell me what caused your grandfather's death?" Rhoddie de Parvange: "Oh, of course, I can scarcely remember him, but I have frequently heard my father say that he died of cholera infantum."

A VIENNA gentleman went to Munkácsy, the painter, the other day, and explained that he would like to buy some pictures by him. "Only," he added, "I cannot afford to pay the prices you now ask. Could you not tell me where I could find some of your early works, painted when you were a young man in Hungary—something that I could buy cheap?" "Certainly," there are two or three hundred in my native village of Munkácsy—the houses I painted when I was Michael Lieh, painter and glazier."

AFFRATED HUSBAND (in the editorial room improving an obituary): "There, that's a beautiful story about my wife. Oh, it's so kind of you, sir, and I shan't forget it soon. It reads just like a poem: Br-er, I say-er, can't you change it a little—the second line there?" Editor: "Oh, yes. I'll put anything you want in there." Afflicted husband: "Well, then, make it read, 'Helen Louisa,' and so forth, and so forth, 'wife of Thomas Wrench—who keeps the best bakery of this town, and where fresh yeast can be had each hour—passed into rest,' and so forth—you understand. You'll do it? All right! Good-by."

HOW DUMAS PAID HIS SHOEMAKER.—Alexandre Dumas was frequently visited by a shoemaker, to whom he owed a sum of twenty louis. He invariably gave the man his breakfast, and a louis to pay his expenses and buy cakes for his children, but never paid the bill. This went on for two years, during which time the tradesman received some two hundred louis, and as many breakfasts, without the original account being in any way diminished. One day it occurred to Dumas to pay him. The man rejected the money with tears. "I am very poor, have a sick wife, and a large family to bring up," said he. "I implore you, M. Dumas, not to alter our present agreeable way of doing business."



## SOCIETY.

THE Princess of Wales and her daughters returned from Copenhagen on Thursday, the 16th ult., arriving at Charing Cross at about half-past twelve. A considerable crowd assembled to see them, but were disappointed, as their Royal Highnesses got into a closed carriage and drove off at a rapid rate, being probably fatigued by the long journey.

WISELY or unwisely, says *Modern Society*, the Connaught children were not told when they bade their parents good-bye at Balmoral that the parting was to be for longer than usual, although they must have wondered in their infantile way why their mamma returned again and again to kiss them and press them to her breast. This the Duchess did until, like a true mother, she broke down utterly and had to seek refuge in her apartments that she might hide her tears. Of course the Queen cried as well, and clung quite passionately to her favourite Arthur, who remains to her the affectionate lad he was twenty years ago. Moisture, too, stood in Princess Beatrice's eyes.

THE Crown Princess of Germany is at Madonna di Campiglio, where she is most thoroughly enjoying herself with her sketch book, which accompanies her on her climbs to the heights that surround the neighbourhood and also to the side of the lakes. Recognizing, however, that her own pencil is altogether powerless to do the beauties of the district justice, she has sent for the German artist, Herz, to come and paint some of the most enchanting bits of scenery for her.

THE Crown Princess of Germany's benevolent effort to assist the increasing number of English governesses, who go to seek their fortunes in Germany, is to take the form of a home, where such ladies will be sure of finding respectable lodging and proper food at a moderate rate for a limited time while looking out for situations, and where they could seek shelter if suddenly deprived of employment, whether by illness or from any other good reason.

By invitation of Lady Ermyntre Malet, a meeting was recently held at the British Embassy, the Crown Princess presided, and a committee was formed. A London branch was considered a necessary adjunct, and this is to meet on the first Wednesday in every month at the Hon. Lady Ponsonby's, Ambassadors' Court, St. James's Palace.

The Crown Princess is president, Princess Christian and the Duchess of Connaught are vice-presidents, and the following ladies constitute the board of management:—The Duchess of Bedford, the Marchioness of Salisbury, the Dowager Countess of Airlie, the Countess of Rosebery, the Lady Arthur Russell, the Viscountess Downe, the Lady Amptill, and the Hon. Lady Ponsonby. The Duchess of Westminster, Lady Goldsmid, and Mrs. Gooch have seats on the council.

THE marriage of Mr. A. W. Maudslott Richards, Royal Scots Greys, of Ardermine, county Wexford, and Miss Lillie Kirk, second daughter of the late Mr. W. Millar Kirk, of The Park, Gory, Ireland, was recently celebrated at St. James's, Piccadilly, and was a very stylish affair.

The bride wore a costume of velours frié and satin, the bodice and train were composed of the same velvet, with a spray of orange blossoms on one side of the bodice; the skirt was of satin duchesse, trimmed with flounces of Brussels lace; in her hair she wore diamond ornaments and a Brussels lace veil, and carried a bouquet of orange blossom. Her train was carried by Master Mallett, who wore a fancy costume suitable to the occasion.

The bridesmaids, four in number, wore the colours of the Scots Greys; costumes of grey satin, with waistcoats of yellow, red and blue stripes; high-crowned sailor hats, with ribbons of the same colour.

## STATISTICS.

AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS.—The statistics of the Agricultural Holdings of Great Britain throw rather an unexpected light on the size of farms. The total number is 555,855. The largest number of holdings is shown to consist of farms of five acres and less. Between five acres and twenty, the holding may be said to become a farm, and of these there are 148,806. Farms of from twenty acres to fifty are 84,109 in number; of those of from fifty acres to a hundred there are 84,715; and of farms from a hundred to three hundred there are 79,573. Above three hundred acres the numbers rapidly diminish; the number between three and five hundred acres being only 18,875; from five hundred to a thousand, 4,826; and above a thousand acres only 663. The average size of the holdings under fifty acres is 38½ acres; of those under a hundred 73½, and of those under three hundred 171½ acres. The largest number of horses, of cows and cattle, of sheep and lambs, and of pigs is on those farms which average 171½ acres. These farms cover 13,659,496 acres; employ 581,198 horses, have 2,671,021 cows and cattle, 9,498,367 sheep and lambs, and 808,230 pigs. The average size of agricultural holdings in England and Scotland is 60 acres; in Wales 46½ acres. Wales has 60,000 holdings against 80,000 in Scotland; but has a somewhat larger proportion of horses, a smaller proportion of cows and cattle, a very much smaller proportion of sheep, but a larger number of pigs. In sheep and lambs Scotland has a far larger proportion to the number of its farms than even England.

## GEMS.

IF a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.

It is more from carelessness about truth, than from intentional lying, that there is so much falsehood in the world.

If you hit the mark, you must aim a little above it; every arrow that flies feels the attraction of the earth.

The first in conversation is truth, the next good sense, the third good humour, and the fourth wit.

UGLINESS of the right sort is a kind of beauty. It has some of the best qualities of beauty—it attracts observation and fixes the memory.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

COLD POTATOES REDRESSED.—Chop or slice cold boiled potatoes quite fine, place them in a baking dish, strewn butter and salt on them, and dredge a little flour on each layer. When full, pour milk over them, and bake in the oven to a nice brown.

TOOTHACHE, caused by a cold in the facial nerves, may often be relieved by wringing a soft towel out of cold water, and sprinkling it with strong vinegar. This should be laid on the face like a poultice, and will often be followed by a refreshing sleep.

GERMAN STEW.—Take one and one-half pounds of neck of mutton and put it into a pot with a tablespoonful of dripping; add two onions sliced, allowing them to fry gently; add a little water, cover the pot and stew slowly for an hour. Now wash a good firm cabbage; remove outside leaves, and divide it into eight pieces lengthwise; place it in water; peel six potatoes, and cut them in slices; place them also in the water. When the meat has stewed as above place the cabbage and potatoes round the meat; sprinkle over them a teaspoonful of salt and a half of pepper; replace the lid and stew for three-quarters of an hour, taking care it does not burn. The whole is cooked by steam, and is good and economical.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

MEMORIES of good words, of forgotten prayers; voices of friends neglected; lessons of life from which we turned impatiently, as children from dry tasks—these all may rise again in no spectral light, but clad with a saintly halo; rise like the fountain in the desert that quenched the thirst of perishing Ishmael, when all around seemed but barren sand; rise, as the good thought rose in the dissolute prodigal's heart while he fed the fowl swine despairing; turning our steps back, like his, into that long-forsaken track of peace which shall lead at last to our Father's mercy and the eternal pardon.

THE CARE OF A PIANO.—In the hot weather a piano should not be placed in a damp room, or left open in a draught of air, for dampness is its most dangerous enemy. It causes the strings and tuning pins to rust, and the cloth used in the construction of the keys of action to swell, whereby the mechanism will move sluggishly, or often stick together. Continued dampness will also injuriously affect the varnish, and raise the soft fibres of the sounding board, thus forming ridges. All this occurs chiefly in the summer season, and the best pianos, made of the most thoroughly seasoned material, are necessarily the most seriously affected by dampness. Extreme heat is scarcely less injurious. A piano should not be placed near an open fire or heated stove, nor close to hot air from furnaces. A piano should be closed when not in use in order to prevent the accumulation of dust, pins, etc., on the sounding board, and yet it should be opened occasionally, and daylight allowed to strike the keys; otherwise the ivory may turn yellow. An India rubber or cloth cover should protect the instrument from bruises and scratches. Moths may be kept out of a piano by a lump of camphor done up in soft paper, placed in the inside cover. A new piano should be tuned every two or three months during the first year, and at longer intervals thereafter.

THE EMPRESS OF JAPAN.—A lady who is given very much to travel, has lately been admitted to an audience of the Empress of Japan (we say empress, for we are not aware of the Japanese feminine for Mikado). She writes: "I was invited—commanded, I suppose I should say—to take luncheon at the Asakusa Palace, recently. The Empress Haru is a slight little woman, not five feet in height. She has the pale, yellow skin, the finely cut features and long, oval face of the high caste Japanese. Although a friend to all progressive movements, the patron and instigator of many reforms and advancements, and a woman of surprisingly modern views, the empress still blackens her teeth in the old style, and thin arches of eyebrows have been traced above those that she dutifully shaved at marriage. Beyond a jewelled ornament fastened above her brow, her costume and coiffure did not differ from that of the ladies surrounding her, and at a distance the parasol was her only distinguishing mark. The empress wore red slippers and skirt, and a kimono of rich bluish-purple silk brocaded with large moon figures in pale colours. The pointed neck was filled with folds of white silk; she balanced in her hand an umbrella of purplish silk embroidered all over with wisteria. She passed straight on to the marquee tent, and giving her parasol to her attendant, entered and sat alone in a throne-like chair before an oval table. Her sixteen attendants stood in a picturesque and brilliant line behind her, and the diplomatic corps, the other nobles and ladies, were seated at little tables before her. The palace attendants served the company to the elaborate collation of everything boned, jellied, iced and truffled; the beautiful set pieces were broken up, and champagne frothed in thin, crystal glasses graven with the imperial crest of the sixteen-petaled chrysanthemum."

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

M. G.—You can make your call any time within a week.

E. S. S.—It is not obligatory upon you to make the gentleman a present.

L. D. D.—You will find a book on etiquette of much service. You can obtain one for a trifle at a good bookseller.

W. W. W.—Ask the young lady first, and if she says "yes" then go to her parents in a manly, straightforward manner, and state your intention.

ANTHONY R.—Borax dissolved in water in which gum arabic has been dissolved, makes a good curling fluid. Any chemist will give you the proportions.

EDITH C.—Squeeze them out, and bathe with dilute spirits of wine. You had better consult a respectable surgeon at once.

H. M. MAC.—We are not able to give the information; but perhaps some of our readers can inform you who was the artist that painted the picture of David Ogden as a farmer's lad.

E. F. W.—We should advise you to stick to the jewelry business. You should have begun the study of painting years ago if you wish to do any good at it—unless you are a heaven-born genius.

H. W. W.—1. Not at all. 2. If you practice every day for a couple of hours, and have some knowledge of music, about six months. 3. You can get one for a shilling at any good music-seller. 4. Probably a seven-stringed would be best.

DORA.—Farne, Farnes, or Ferne Islands are several small islands and rocks in the North Sea, from two to five miles from the English coast, and nearly opposite Scarborough. Two light-houses have been erected on the largest. The passage between the isles is in rough weather very dangerous.

O. M. A.—The city in Portugal that is surrounded by a wall is Évora. It is the seat of an archbishop, and has a splendid Gothic cathedral, a number of convents, hospitals, a house of charity, a museum, and some manufactures of hardware and leather. Among the many monuments of antiquity are a rural temple of Diana, and an aqueduct by which the city is still supplied.

LILLIE.—Scotland is maintained by Scotsmen never to have been conquered. Thomas Campbell wrote:—  
"Triumphant be the little still unfurled,  
Dear Symbol wild! On Freedom's hills it grows,  
Where Vindex scann'd the tyrants of the world,  
And Roman Eagles found unconquered foes."

The Union between Scotland and England, as the "Kingdom of Great Britain"—though the crowns of the two countries were united by the accession of James I. (VI. of Scotland) March 24, 1603—took place in 1707.

LEILA.—To make food for singing birds, knead together three pounds of split peas, ground or beaten to flour, one and a half pounds of fine crumbs of bread, the same quantity of coarse sugar, the raw yolks of six eggs, and six ounces of fresh butter. Put about a third of the mixture at a time in a frying-pan over a gentle fire, and stir it until a little browned, but not burned. When the other two parts are done, and all cold, add to the whole six ounces of raw seed and six pounds of bruised hemp seed, separated from the husks. Mix together, and it will be found excellent food for thrushes, robins, larks, linnets, canaries, finches, and most other singing birds, preserving them in both song and feather.

LOTTIE.—To make elderberry wine, strip the berries clean from the stalks, and put them into a tub; pour boiling water on them, in the proportion of two gallons to three of the berries, press them down into the liquor, and cover them closely. Let them remain in this state until the following day, when the juice must be strained from the fruit; then squeeze from the berries the juice remaining in them, and mix it with what was poured off at first. To every gallon of this mixture of juices, add three pounds of sugar, one ounce of cloves, and one ounce of ginger; boil twenty minutes, keeping it thoroughly skinned. While still hot, put it into a cask, or large stone bottles; fill entirely, and set the wine immediately, with a large spoonful of new yeast put into the bung-hole, and stirred round in the liquor. To make this wine of superior quality the berries should be gathered on a dry day, and used fresh.

K. A. A.—Cleopatra, although she was Queen of Egypt, was a Greek by lineage. She belonged to the royal race of Ptolemies, a long line of Kings of Egypt, beginning with the first Ptolemy, who was an illegitimate son of Philip of Macedon. Cleopatra was, therefore, of Greek descent, not Egyptian, though it is probable, from her long exposure to the hot climate, that she was a brunette. She was married to her brother Dionysius by the mandate of government. He was then only thirteen years old. When he was drowned, the authorities forced her to marry her youngest brother, because the people were adverse to having a woman govern them. Cleopatra was forty-four years of age when she achieved her famous conquest over the Roman ruler, and general Mark Antony. She had reigned twenty-four years when she applied the asp to her breast and followed her lover to the land of Shades. She was called the Sorceress of the Nile, but the most fascinating and dangerous women are not the most beautiful by any means. Personal magnetism has a great deal to do with their power to win hearts. Cleopatra had a splendid physique, no doubt, and she probably had what Shakespeare ascribes to her, the "infinite variety" that "age could not wither nor custom stale."

J. D.—The simple words, "Permit me to congratulate you," will suffice.

C. F. W.—Flaxseed tea will keep the hair in curl a long time.

T. L.—If not exposed to the dust, once in every two or three weeks will be frequent enough to wash or cleanse the hair.

ROBIN.—The famous stone mountain of the United States is in De Kalb County, Georgia. It is a huge mass of granite rising almost perpendicular to the heights of 2,230 feet. It is seven miles in circuit.

PET OF PETS.—There is such a flower. It is an orchid—a native of the South American woods. Its botanical name is *Epidendrum*. It has a snow-white dove—beautifully shaped—in the centre of its petals. Another rare flower—also an orchid—is the Swan—*Synochus Pentrichosum*. It presents the very form of the swan.

JAMES P.—It looks as though you had some reason to be suspicious of your wife. She should be careful to avoid even the appearance of evil, and should be willing to do as you wish in the matters to which you refer. Perhaps if you should pay her more attention yourself it would draw out her better nature, and make her more considerate of your feelings and wishes.

LIONEL.—Affections of the ear are so various that it is difficult to treat them understandingly without giving the ear a personal examination. If, as you say, local practitioners have failed to discover the cause of your hardness of hearing, we scarcely know what to suggest. If the deafness arises from a chronic inflammation of the tympanic membrane, a blister behind the ear will prove to be of service, as well as close attention to the general health. Bathing and active exercises will also be of benefit.

## THE SCAR WILL REMAIN.

Oh, ye who from crime and pollution are free,  
Wash well the temptations that throng around thee!  
A character stained ne'er loses the stain—  
The wound may be healed, but the scar will remain.

'Tis true that the vilest forgiveness may earn—  
The growing lost to the fold may return;  
But sad recollection will bring with it pain—  
The wound may be healed, but the scar will remain.

The misty bloom brushed from the cheek of the plum  
No more to its delicate surface can come;  
And the pure heart polluted ne'er freshens again—  
The wound may be healed, but the scar will remain.

The slave of vile appetites, touched by remorse,  
May weep o'er his follies and alter his course;  
But still on life's tablet his record is plain—  
The wound may be healed, but the scar will remain.

Then shun ye the tempter, and seek ye the goal  
Which promises peace to the world-weary soul.  
If ye sin ye will strive to forget it in vain—  
The wound may be healed, but the scar will remain.

F. S. S.

T. G. H.—1. There is nothing that will remove superfluous hair without injury to the skin. Let it alone. Besides, if removed it will grow again, and be thicker than before. 2. Give him up. 3. You write a good hand.

OFFICER'S SERVANT.—To clean silver or gold lace, lay the lace smooth on a wollen carpet or piece of wollen cloth, and brush it free from dust; then burn a little alum and powder it fine, and afterwards sift it through a lawn sieve; then rub it over the lace with a fine brush. This process will restore the lace to almost its original brightness if it be not too much worn on the threads.

LUCE.—To make skeleton leaves, the leaves selected should be steeped in rain water, in shallow dishes or bowls, and exposed in the sun and air until the soft parts are completely decayed. Some of the leaves will be ready in the course of three or four weeks; others will require a much longer time. It depends very much on the age of the leaf, the nature of its texture, and the heat of the sun. The water should not be changed, but the bowl is to be filled as the liquid evaporates. It will be necessary to examine the bowls occasionally, and to remove the leaves ready for cleaning to a basin of soft water. Then gently move and rub them with the fingers until every particle of the green falls away, and there is nothing but the fibre remaining. The skeleton leaves should then be carefully dried, first pressing them in a soft towel to remove all moisture. They are now ready for bleaching, and may be laid away until a sufficient quantity is prepared. The liquor for bleaching is made by pouring a quart of boiling water upon a quarter of a pound of chloride of lime in powder. This should be allowed to remain until cold, and the clear liquor strained off, which may be bottled for use when wanted. Mix with cold water, in the proportion of two quarts of water to one quart of lime, and steep the skeleton leaves or capsules in the fluid. The colour will afford the best proof of the time, and even of the quantity of the liquid which is required to whiten them. They must be once more rinsed in clean, soft water, and the moisture gently wiped from them, when they will only require to be dried. The leaves of the poplar, maple, pear, holly, ivy and magnolia, dissect much better than others; while the seed-vessels of the Oriental poppy, thorn apple and hemlock, after they have shed their seeds, make beautiful objects. They only require to be thoroughly dried and then bleached.

BESSIE.—Not strictly etiquette, but permissible among intimate acquaintances.

A. B. C.—July 3, 1868, fell on Friday; September 1, 1870, on Thursday.

CORRIE R.—The population of New York city in 1880, according to the last U.S. census, was 1,306,290. There has been no regular census since, but its population in 1885 was estimated at 1,900,000.

JEM.—A bloodstone is a variety of quartz, of a dark green colour, having little red spots of jasper sprinkled through its mass. When cut and polished the red spots appear like little drops of blood. It is somewhat prized as a gem.

DORA.—As you object to the use of nitric acid or lunar caustic, try the following to remove your corn:—Bind a piece of cotton around the toe at night when retiring, and repeat the operation until the corn becomes so soft as to be readily removed with a pair of scissors.

STACE STRUCK.—Mary Anderson, the actress, was born in Sacramento, California, in 1839. She made her first appearance on the stage on Nov. 27, 1875, in Louisville, Kentucky, U.S., as Juliet, and her first in London on Sept. 1, 1883, at the Lyceum Theatre, as *Perthanda* in "Ingomar." She is the stepdaughter of Dr. Hamilton Griffin.

LOTTIE BROWN.—To make "the queen's own perfume," take essence of cloves and bergamot, of each three quarters of a dram; neroli, a dram; essence of musk, half an ounce; rose water, spirit of turpentine, and the strongest spirits of wine, of each half a pint; spirits of juniper and cassia, of each one pint; dissolve the essences in the spirits of wine; then add the other spirits, and, when well mixed, add the rose water.

W. W. R.—You say the gentleman who has lately been paying you attention has never proposed to you, but sometimes says that "if he ever marries" it will be yourself that he will choose for a wife. That is rather an important remark to make to a lady, and the next time he says any such thing to you, you should tell him that he is mistaken so far as making you a party to his marriage is concerned. You can then tell him as much or as little as you please with regard to the state of your affections; but make it clear to him that he need not indulge in any hope.

EUDORA.—Yes, one may be charming and yet possess red hair and a sky-potting nose. Red is a fashionable colour for hair just now. The beauty artists give the tint of Titian red to the customer's hair instead of "stage gold," which is gone out of vogue. The *retrouvé* nose has also been brought into vogue by the painters. They are fond of putting the elegant, eagle, upturned nose on the faces of their girl-figures. There is no arbitrary standard of beauty. The Turks admire a woman so fat that she looks like an animated hoghead. They feed their brides on butter and waste rose-leaves to make them roly-poly. The Greeks, on the contrary, preferred the lithe, willowy type of woman. None of their sculptured goddesses have any surplus flesh on their graceful limbs. The Greek ideal nose was perfectly straight. To our modern ideas this is too severe, and give it a curve between the eyes. The Egyptians liked flat noses, and in Tartary the greatest beauty is she who has the smallest nose.

ELFIE.—Such terms as untruthful, selfish and deceitful are rather harsh ones to apply to the gentleman, and they are so constantly associated by poets and novel-writers with any falling off in the attentions of a lover, that we scarcely expect young ladies to believe that indifference may arise without deserving such hard names. Long-tried friendships, where esteem, kind attentions and mutual interest cement a union, are not, indeed, liable to this sudden discontinuance; but the fancy at a moment may be vanquished by another fancy. There may be occasion for pity on the one side, but not room for blame on the other. All we can suggest of consolation is, that the sudden fit of no love which has come upon your lover might have happened to you, and a consideration of this circumstance ought to mollify your resentment. Your attachment seems to have been one of those sudden fancies on both sides that seldom prove to be lasting, and from which shallow-hearted young men are very apt to recede. Besides, are you, the fairer fair, no way blameable in securing the affection of the individual who has declared himself your admirer? We leave this trying question to be solved by your own feelings and recollections. Should you chance to meet the fickle-minded gentleman, it would, perhaps, be well for you to behave with such dignity and reserve as would keep him at a respectful distance.

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